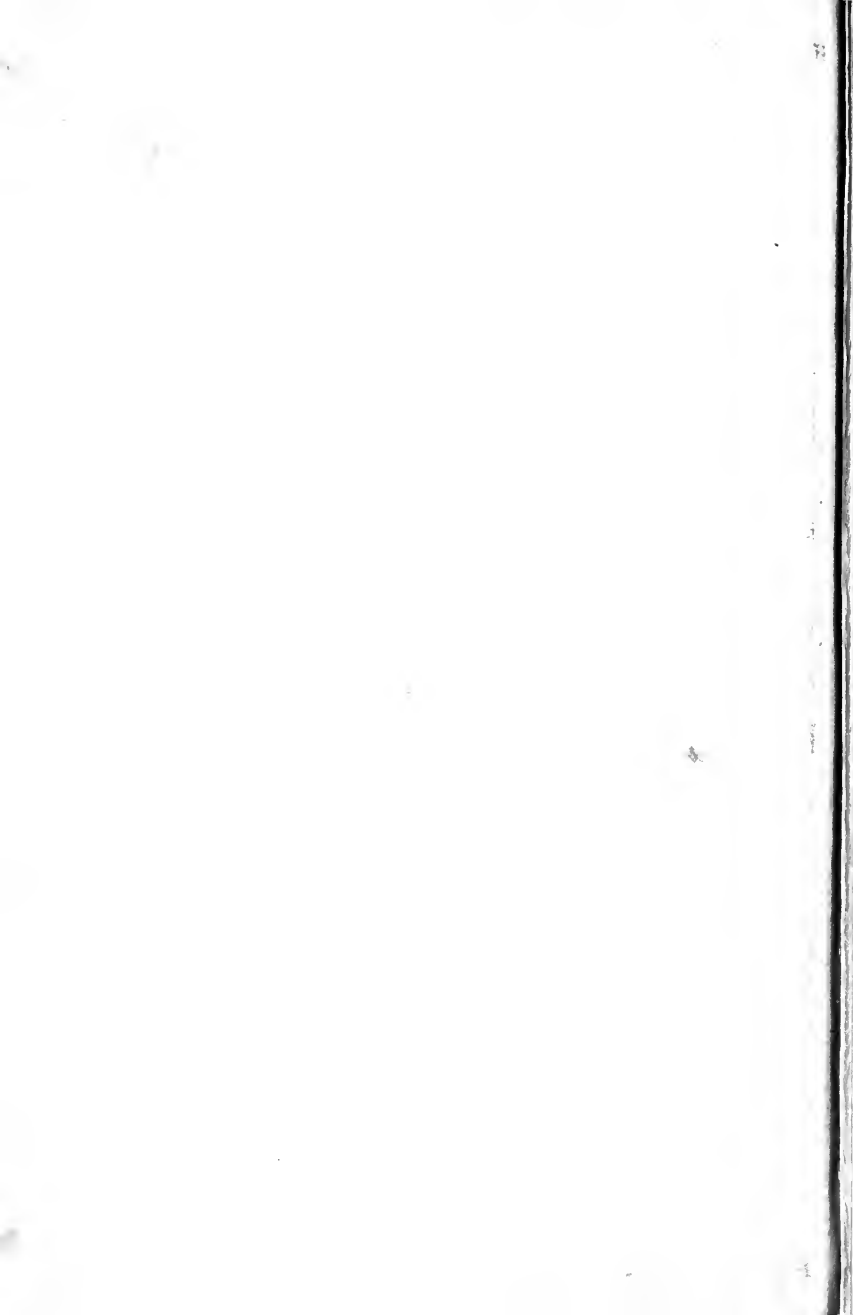


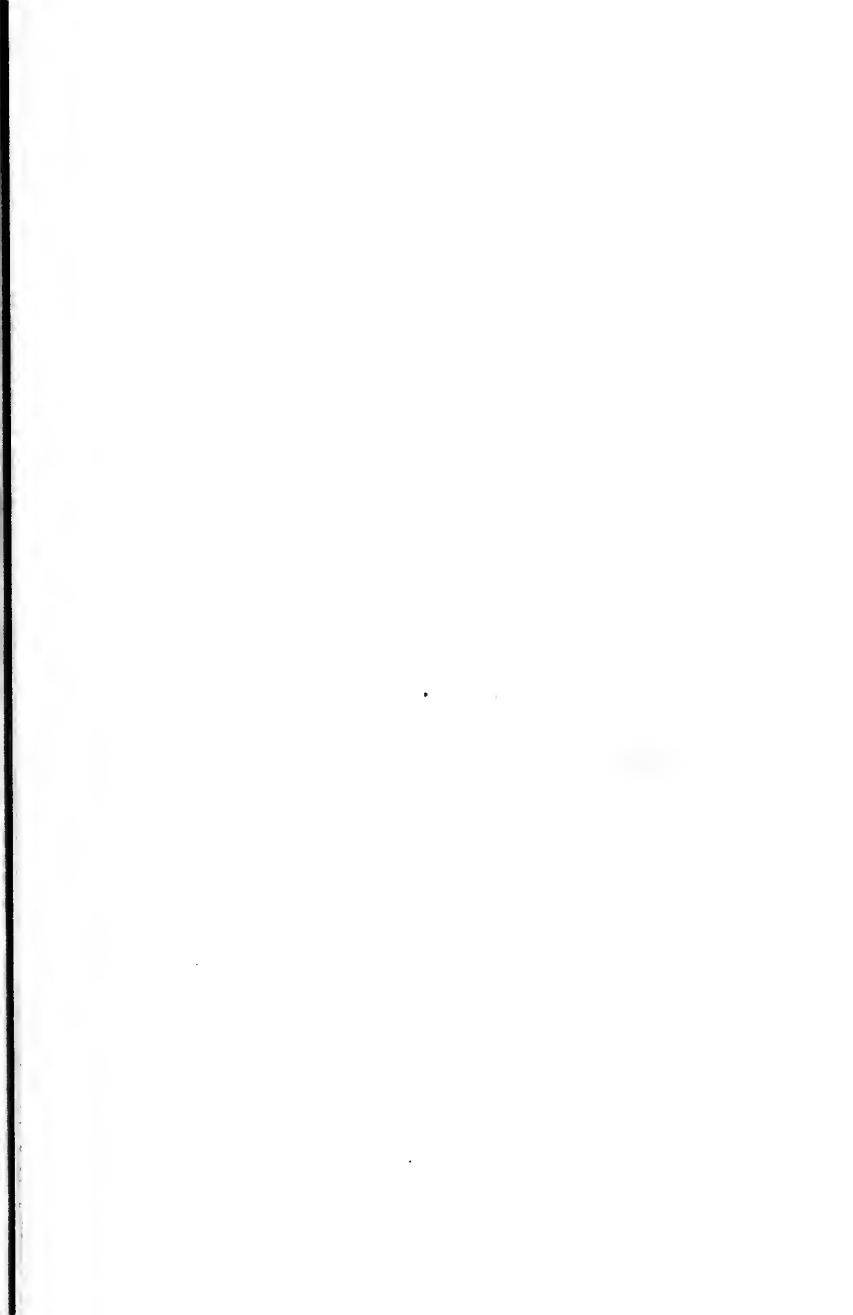
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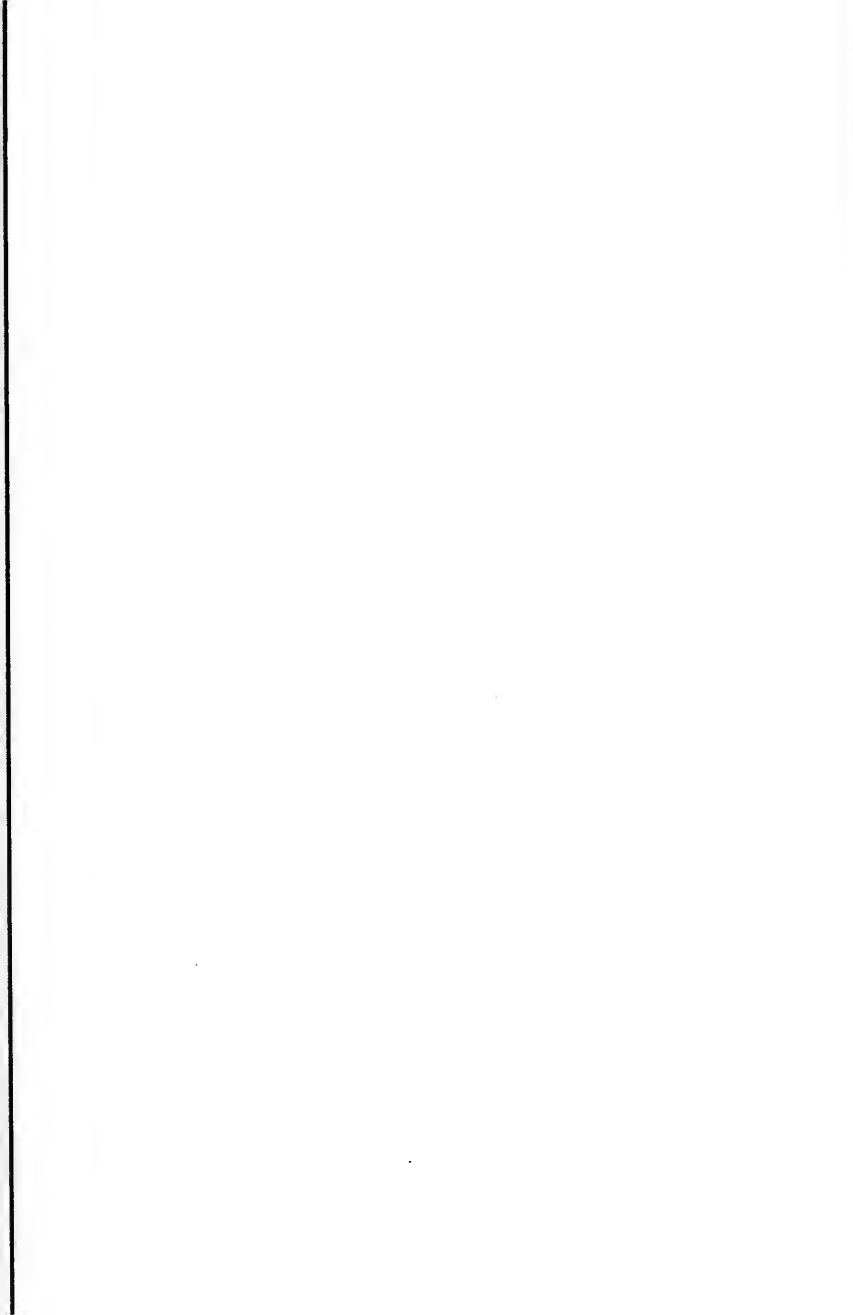
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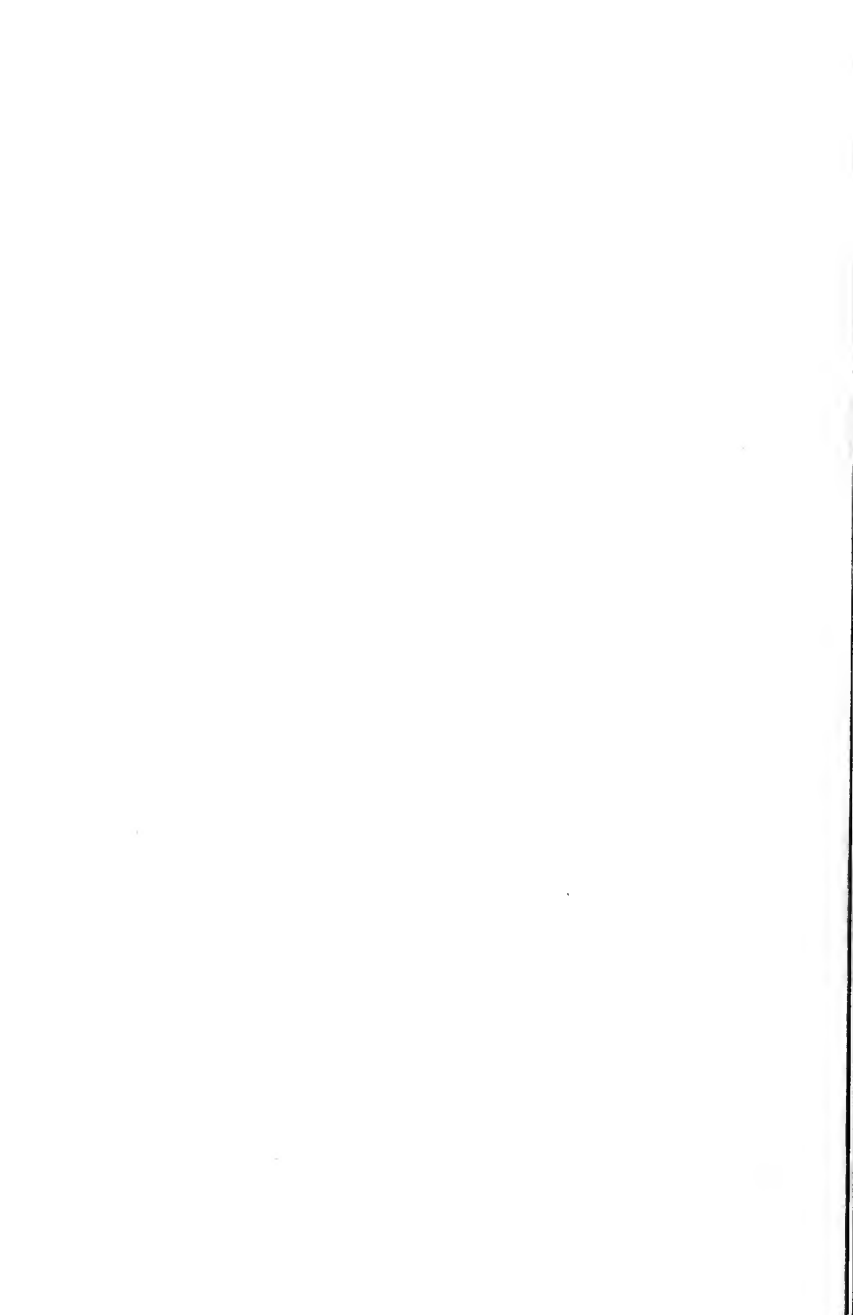
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The Elizabethan Hamlet





# THE ELIZABETHAN HAMLET

A Study of the Sources, and of Shakspere's  
Environment, to show that the Mad Scenes  
had a Comic Aspect now Ignored

By  
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With a Prefatory Note by  
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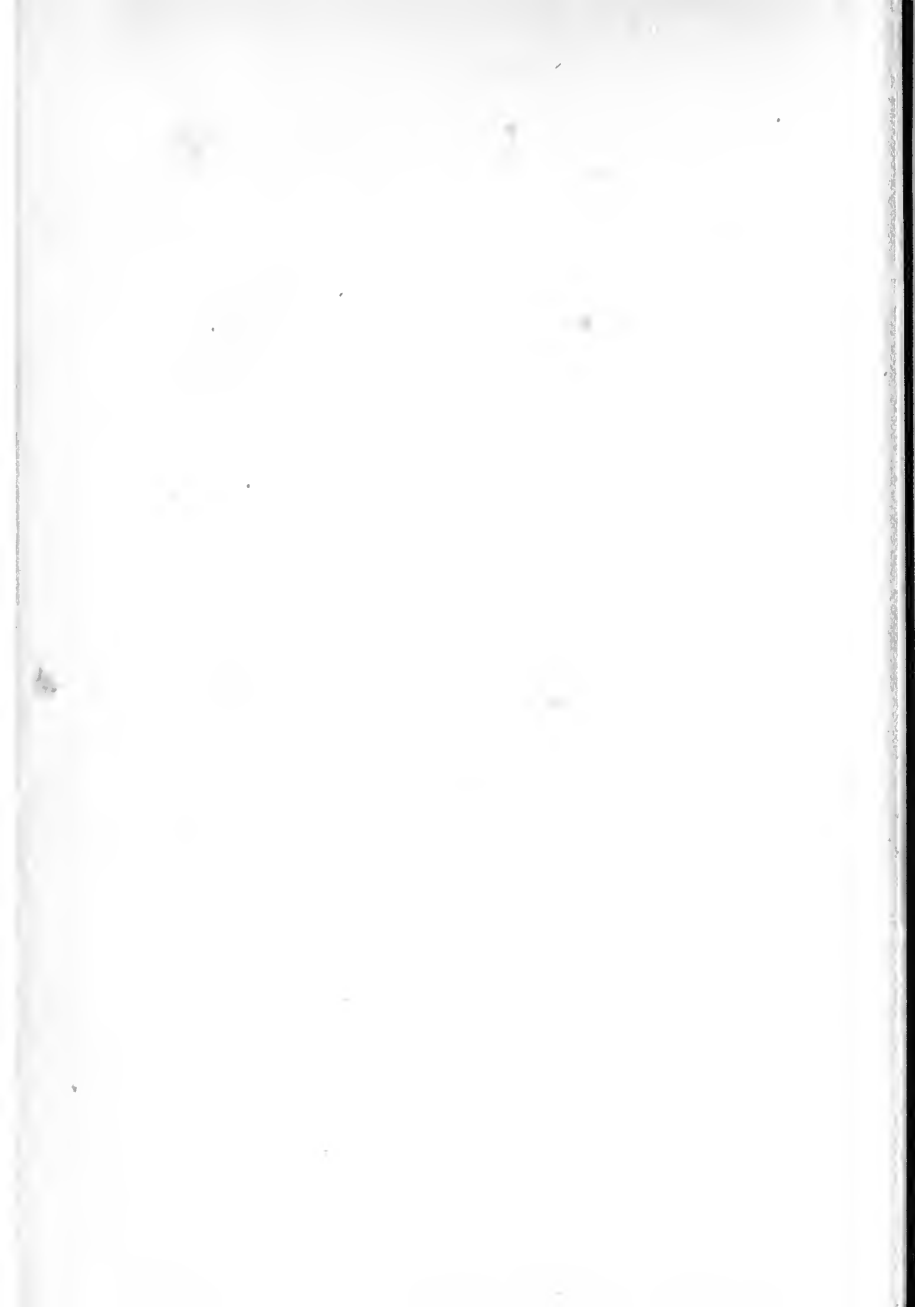
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TO MY MOTHER



## A Prefatory Note

*Mr. John Corbin, of Harvard and Oxford, asks me to put a word or two at the front of his Essay. I have no special authority to speak on the subject, but I do not wish to decline his hospitality. When he showed me his work and we talked it over, it seemed to me that he had got hold of a truth that has not been clearly, if at all, expressed in our Elizabethan studies—to wit, that the 16th century audience's point of view, and, of necessity, the playwright's treatment of his subject, were very different from ours of to-day in many matters of mark. Just as the impossibility of getting women actors on the Globe stage must have cramped and hampered in some respects the dramatist's presentment of women, and tended to make him emphasize certain convenient types of feminine character, and omit or but briefly touch on others, thus affecting the drama as a complete presentment of life, so the attitude of an Elizabethan audience towards physical pain and mania has affected the plays of Shakspeare and Webster and others in a way that is apt to puzzle the modern critic, especially if he be unfamiliar with the drama of other days and other lands. Hence, though I have had nothing to do with Mr. Corbin's conception of*

## PREFATORY NOTE

*or treatment of his subject, and have never given any direction to his studies, I am so far responsible for the present book that I advised him to print his Essay, as his contribution to the study of a great subject; and this responsibility I hereby acknowledge.*

F. YORK POWELL

*Oriel College, Oxford*  
*Jan., 1895*

# The Elizabethan Hamlet

THE sense of Hamlet's reality has so im-FOREWORDpressed the critics that almost all of them write as if he were an actual person, a recently deceased acquaintance; and assume that, if they fail to reach a solution of the problem his character presents, the fault must of necessity lie in their analysis. But Hamlet's reality is scarcely more remarkable than the inconsistencies that, in spite of the faith and zeal of the critics, have prevented them from agreeing as to his character. One man considers Hamlet great intellectually, but malevolent; another takes him to be gentle and just, but lacking in courage; a third thinks that, though he is not lacking in courage, his intellect so overbalances his will that he reflects away the time for action; some hold him quite sane, others make him wholly distraught: so that though all are impressed with the reality of his character, hardly anyone is

*The opposing  
views of  
Hamlet*

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satisfied with another's interpretation. Yet it is to be noted that, contradictory as the interpretations are, they are to an amazing degree based on the facts of the play. To one critic, for instance, the marvellously vivid treatment of the Ghost is convincing evidence that Hamlet is the great precursor of nineteenth century spiritualistic faith. But, in spite of his oath to remember his father's spirit,—

*not inconsistent with the text :*

Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe,—

he thinks of the hereafter only as

*The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns.*

Another critic is obviously quite as well justified in finding Hamlet the precursor of modern speculative doubt. One or two such contradictions would not, of course, be hard to reconcile; but they are legion, and it is notorious that no hypothesis, however well founded on the facts of the play, has succeeded in reconciling all of them.

To the historical student of Elizabethan literature the question must arise whether



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this disagreement does not spring in part at least from a want of knowledge of such mundane facts in Shakspeare's life—the character of his audiences, and the conventional Elizabethan methods of play writing—as inevitably influence a dramatist's productions. We have Shakspeare's own testimony, in the Sonnets, to the narrowness and hardship of his life and calling. He was a popular playwright in an age when the drama was as little reputable as our variety stage; and similarly *Hamlet* was a popular tale told and re-told during four centuries, possessing scant literary and certainly no philosophical significance. Too little emphasis has been laid on this. The purpose of this essay is to study the play from the point of view of the gallants and 'prentices for whom Richard Burbage acted it,—to revivify the Elizabethan Hamlet.

The discussion will fall into five chief divisions. I shall consider first the Elizabethan sources of Shakspeare's story. From these I shall hope to show not only that *Hamlet* was originally a crude tragedy of blood; but also that certain phases of the story

*A possible reason for this.*

*The thesis outlined.*

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—notably Hamlet's madness—were treated more comically in the versions preceding Shakspeare's *Hamlet* than we can readily conceive. This will suggest my second consideration, a study of the comic sense of Elizabethan audiences, the actual public for which Shakspeare wrote. This consideration will, I hope, confirm the first: it will show that to Shakspeare's contemporaries many things—insanity, torture, and the like—now held repulsive or even tragic, were conventionally amusing; and that consequently in the pre-Shakspearean play Hamlet's madness must have been an actual source of mirth. Thirdly, I shall consider certain peculiar features of Shakspeare's environment and methods in writing which make it unlikely that he effaced wholly the traditional comic treatment of Hamlet's madness. This will lead to my fourth division, an exposition of certain of the most important scenes in old plays where madness is treated as a source of mirth, and of similar scenes in Shakspeare. In my fifth and final division I shall present whatever evidence I shall have gathered

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showing that there are distinct traces in the Hamlet familiar to modern readers of the comic treatment of madness, even in some of those scenes which from a modern point of view are most deeply tragic. Such a demonstration as I have outlined would account for the divergent views of the critics, and pave the way to a well grounded study of Shakspeare's meaning.

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## I

PRE-SHAK-  
SPEREAN  
HAMLETS

The ultimate source of the plot of Hamlet is a tale in the *Historiæ Danicæ* of Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote as early as the twelfth century. Other early versions are found, but the earliest known to Shakspeare was probably the prose *Hystorie of Hamblet*, which was written, in French, by Belleforest, in 1570. On the basis of this *Hystorie* an English play was written not later than 1589. This play is now lost; but we have two plays which were founded directly upon it. The first of these is a German version, *Fratricide Punished*, and the second is Shakspeare's earliest extant version, the first quarto *Hamlet*. This was printed piratically in 1603. In the following year the second quarto was printed authentically. This is to all intents and purposes the modern *Hamlet*.

The *Hystorie of Hamblet* was thus written thirty-odd years before Shakspeare's first quarto; and there is little doubt that it

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was translated into English almost immediately, so great was its popularity. The earliest extant edition, moreover, is dated 1608, four years later than Shakspeare's second quarto. Its popularity, accordingly, was not only immediate but, in spite of the success of the play on the same subject, was sustained. This fact will be of the utmost importance in judging of the influence it exerted on the dramatic versions of the story. No better brief summary of it can be given than that contained in the headings of the chapters, and in the marginal notes. These I have combined, inserting here and there a word to explain the narrative by connecting it with Shakspeare's *Hamlet*; but I have kept as far as possible to the literal wording of the original.

'CHAP. I. How Horvendile [King Hamlet] and Fengon [Claudius] were made Governours of the Province of Ditmarse, and how Horvendile married Geruth, [Queen Gertrude] the daughter to [the] chief K. of Denmark, by whom he had Hamlet: and how after his marriage his brother Fengon slewe him

*s. The 'Historie of Hamlet'*

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trayterously, and incestuously married his brothers wife, and what followed.

'CHAP. II. How Hamblet counterfeited the mad man, making many subtile answers to escape the tyrannie of his uncle, and how he was tempted by a woman (through his uncles procurement) who thereby thought to undermine the Prince, and by that meanes to finde out whether he counterfeited madnesse or not: and how Hamblet would by no meanes bee brought to consent unto her, and what followed.

'CHAP. III. How Fengon [Claudius], uncle to Hamblet, a second time to intrap him in his politick madnes, caused one of his counsellors [Polonius] to be secretly hidden in the queenes chamber, behind the arras, to heare what speeches passed between Hamblet and the Queen; and how Hamblet killed him, and escaped that danger, and what followed.

'CHAP. IIII. How Fengon [Claudius] the third time devised to send Hamblet to the king of England, with secret letters to have him put to death: and how Hamblet,

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when his companions [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern] slept, read the letters, and instead of them counterfeited others, willing the king of England to put the two messengers to death, and to marry his daughter to Hamlet, which was effected; and how Hamlet escaped out of England.

‘CHAP. V. How Hamlet, having escaped out of England, arrived in Denmarke the same day that the Danes were celebrating his funerals, supposing him to be dead in England; and how he revenged his fathers death upon his uncle and the rest of the courtiers; and what followed.’

Some idea of the inexpressible brutality of this story may be had in the few citations for which I have space. The importance of these passages will lie in the fact that the *Hystorie* afforded the ground-plan upon which the lost play was constructed. The feigned madness of Hamlet is thus described:

‘Every day beeing in the queenes palace,  
. . . hee rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the durt and mire, his face all filthy and blacke, running through

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the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one worde, but such as seemed to proceede of madnesse and meere frenzie ; all his actions and jestures beeing no other than the right countenances of a man wholly deprived of all reason and understanding, in such sort, that as then hee seemed fitte for nothing but to make sport to the pages and ruffling courtiers that attended in the court of his uncle and father-in-law.' Hamblet's revenge is accomplished as follows : Hamblet 'seeing those drunken bodies, filled with wine, lying like hogs upon the ground, some sleeping, others vomiting the over great abundance of wine which without measure they had swallowed up, made the hangings about the hall to fall downe and cover them all over ; which he nailed to the ground . . . in such sort, that . . . it was impossible to get from under them : and presently he set fire in the foure corners of the hal, in such sort, that all that were as then therein not one escaped away, but were forced to purge their sins by fire, and dry up the great abundance of liquor by them received into their bodies.'



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This revenge he completed by giving the King 'such a blowe upon the chine of the necke, that hee cut his head cleane from his shoulders.'

The probable influence of such passages upon the play may best be explained by reference to one of the most striking conventions of Elizabethan tragedy, the comic underplot. The necessity of blending the humorous with the pathetic—so thoroughly acknowledged by modern writers—was dimly recognized by the earlier English dramatists. Their first crude device was to introduce among the tragic events a series of comic scenes. These were usually quite distinct from the main action. Many of the most celebrated old dramas may be divided into two plays, a pure comedy and an un-mixed tragedy, each complete in itself. Certain of the dramatists, however, and prominent among them Shakspeare, seem to have felt the awkwardness of this device; for, instead of the consistent underplot, they introduced stray comic scenes having a direct connection with the main plot, of which the Porter's

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scene in *Macbeth* and the Grave Diggers' in *Hamlet* are notable instances. They led, no doubt, to the more artistic method of mingling comedy and tragedy in the same scene—of which the serio-comic relationship between Lear and his Fool is an excellent example. But this was a later development,—at the time when the lost play was written it was unknown.

*in which  
Hamlet's brutal  
madness*

As the *Hystorie* contained no series of scenes upon which to construct a comic under-plot, we must look to its few amusing incidents for a hint as to the basis of the comedy in the lost play. The foul humour of Hamlet's mock madness is frankly alleged by the author to have made 'sport to pages and ruffling courtiers;' and in the account of Hamlet's revenge upon the courtiers and upon the King there is a brutal humour, a savage sarcasm, which any one familiar with rudimentary human nature will recognize, revolting as it is to our conventional humanity. The intelligent playwright could scarcely have failed to take the hint to derive his comedy from these scenes. But herein lies

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the significant point: If he did so, those incidents which in the second quarto, the familiar *Hamlet*, are most tragic, must, in the lost play, have had a distinct comic aspect. *supplies the place of comic underplot.*

This paradox is even more clearly suggested in another scene. A certain lady in the *Hystorie* is set to tempt Hamblet carnally 'through his uncles procurement,' in a solitary wood. It is thus to be discovered, to the lady and to courtiers in ambush, whether he is really mad. This is the germ of the Hamlet-Ophelia scene in Shakspeare, which has probably been more variously interpreted and less understood than any other tragic scene in literature. The lady was a 'faire and beawtifull woman' to whom the Prince was 'wholy . . . in affection.' As she too had 'from her infancy loved and favoured him, . . . [she] informed [him] of the treason' intended against him. Nevertheless, she was 'exceeding sorrowfull . . . to leave his companie without injoying the pleasure of his body, whome shee loved more than herselfe,' and essayed, though in vain, to tempt Hamblet.

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The upshot of all this was that 'the prince in this sort having both deceived the courtiers, and the ladyes expectation, that affirmed and swore that hee never once offered to have his pleasure of the woman, although in subtilty hee affirmed the contrary, every man there upon assured themselves that without all doubt he was distraught of his sences.'

*The origin of  
the Hamlet-  
Ophelia scene.*

The situation is in a measure obscured by the lack of the context, and by the involution of the sentences ; but it is briefly this : When the lady was eager, Hamblet rebuffed her ; but when she admitted to the King that Hamblet had not satisfied her 'expectation,' he insisted falsely that he had. Either of these actions was, to the courtiers and the King, proof positive of his insanity. His purpose in all this was the very serious one of escaping the peril in which he lay ; but in executing it he turned the tables so neatly on both the 'beawtifull lady' and the King that the situation remains to this day vulgarly amusing. Yet in the second quarto this scene is, under our modern interpretation, one of the most deeply tragic in literature.

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Though this *Hystorie* is quite alien in spirit to the second quarto, it contains most, though not all, of the incidents there. It probably contains too the suggestions of others. The incident of Hamlet's mock burial may have suggested the true burial of Ophelia; and his successful oration to the people may have suggested the idea of making Laertes appear at the head of a popular insurrection. The incidents the *Hystorie* lacks are the play within the play, the grave-digging scene, and chiefly the idea of making the murder of Hamlet's father secret, thus introducing the Ghost. Shakspeare's debt to the 'Hystorie.'

So much for the *Hystorie*. We have now to ascertain as far as possible the nature of the lost play founded upon it. 2. The lost play In the first place, the brutality of the *Hystorie* makes it not unlikely that the lost play was a tragedy of blood—after the kind of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, or Shakspeare's *Titus Andronicus*. In the second place, the fact that Hamlet's subtly pretended madness was used throughout the *Hystorie* to amuse the reader, even in those scenes

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which in the first and second quartos appear to us most deeply tragic, suggests that they may have been utilised in the lost play to supply the lack of comic underplot. It will at least be interesting to keep an eye open for evidence upon these two points.

antedating  
the first quarto  
by fourteen  
years,

The date of the lost play is fixed by contemporary allusions as not later than 1589, fourteen years before the publication of Shakspeare's earliest known version. These allusions give some clue to its character. Nash, in an epistle prefaced to Greene's *Menaphon*, printed in 1589, says, 'English *Seneca* read by Candle-light, yeelds many good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so forth: and if you intreate him faire in a frosty morning, hee will affoord you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls of Tragicall speeches.' In *Wits Miserie*, 1596, Thomas Lodge, speaking of an 'incarnate diuel,' says that he 'looks as pale as the Visard of ye ghost which cried so miserally at ye Theator like an oister wife, *Hamlet, reuenge*.' In Dekker's *Satiro-mastix*, printed in 1602, the year previous to the publication of the first

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quarto, we find:—‘*Asini*. Wod I were hang’d if I can call you any names but Captaine and Tuca. *Tuc*. No Fye’st, my name’s Hamlet reuenge: thou hast been at Parris garden hast not?’ This phrase, ‘Hamlet, revenge!’ which Shakspeare saw fit to omit in his version, had made so deep an impression on the popular mind that years passed before the extant treatment of the scene effaced it. In Dekker’s *Westward Hoe*, published in 1607, four years after the publication of Shakspeare’s first quarto, we find:—‘I but when light Wiues make heauy husbands, let these husbands play mad *Hamlet*; and crie reuenge.’ So likewise in Rowland’s *The Night Raven*, 1618, fifteen years after the first quarto:

I will not cry *Hanlet Reuenge* my greeues,  
But I will call *Hang-man Reuenge* on theeues.

What first strikes one in these allusions is that in the lost play the Ghost’s demand for revenge impressed the public as blatant; and blatancy is very foreign to the moral dignity of Shakspeare’s Ghost. The allusions contain, moreover, a vein of contempt and

*ridiculed for  
its rant,*

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satire. In this they resemble nothing so much as the allusions to certain extant tragedies of blood, the popularity of which was quite equal to that of the early *Hamlet*. For instance, in the Introduction to *Bartholomew Fair*, Ben Jonson says: 'Hee that will sweare, *Ieronimo*, or *Andronicus*, are the best playes, yet, shall passe vnexcepted at, heere, as a man whose iudgment shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these fīue and twentie, or thirtie yeeres. Though it be an *Ignorance*, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to *truth*, a confirm'd errorr does well; such a one the *Author* knowes where to finde him.' The satire of this is obvious. Both in the phrases from the lost play, and in the manner in which they are quoted, we have very strong confirmation that the play was a tragedy of blood.

and apparently  
a tragedy of  
blood.

The next step in fixing the character of the lost play is to study the two extant versions founded directly upon it, the German version and the first quarto of Shakspeare. From the point of view of these versions we shall discover further evidence that the



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lost play was a tragedy of blood, and moreover, that in it the comic passages I have pointed out in the *Hystorie* were used to supply the place of an underplot.

The German version contains the bloody incidents of the *Hystorie* so augmented as to present the main points of the first quarto: the secret fratricide, the incestuous marriage, the Ghost, Hamlet's feigned madness, the play within the play, the voyage to England, Ophelia's distraction and death, Laertes' return, the foul fencing bout, and the poisoned drink. The only important scenes omitted are those between Hamlet and the two courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the Grave-diggers' scene, and the scene at Ophelia's grave.

In spite, however, of this close agreement in plot, the play appears, at first reading, debased beyond all kinship to Elizabethan literature—so barren of interest, so unutterably coarse in every detail, as to be a thorn in the side of the lover of Shakspeare's Hamlet.

A fair idea of its puerility may be had

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*hopelessly per-  
verted in seem-  
ing,*

in the scene which corresponds to the episode, found in all English versions, of the voyage to England and the killing of the King's emissaries. This episode is presented in the German play with a childish striving after stage effect. Hamlet is represented on an island, about to be killed at the King's order by bandits. At the last moment he says:

*'Ham.* Hear me—one word more. . .

I . . . beg you to let me raise to my Maker a fervent prayer; after that I am ready to die. But I will give you a signal: I will turn my hands toward heaven, and the moment I stretch out my arms, fire! Aim both pistols at my sides, and when I say "Shoot!" give me as much as I need, and be sure to hit me so that I shall not be long in torture.' . . .

Then *'(spreading out his hands)* Shoot! *(throwing himself forward on his face between the two, who shoot each other)*. Oh just Heaven! thanks be to thee for this angelic idea! . . . But these villains,—as was their work, so is their pay. The dogs are still stirring; they have shot each other. But out of revenge I will give them a death-

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blow to make sure . . . (*Stabs them with their own swords*).’  
*Act IV., Scene I.*

The treatment of the Ghost offers a similar instance. The First Sentinel, as he leaves the platform, admits that he has been frightened by a ghost, and is glad enough to go home. The second sentinel makes fun of him, but is presently himself overtaken. The Majesty of buried Denmark ‘*from behind gives him a box on the ear, and makes him drop his musket, and exit.*’ ‘The devil himself is after me,’ he exclaims. ‘Oh, I am so frightened, I can’t stir!’  
*Act I., Scene II.*

*e.g. Hamlet's  
escape, and the  
Ghost scene,*

In both of these scenes, and to a like degree throughout the play, the tragic incidents of Shakspeare’s *Hamlet* are told with an eye to comic effect, and we have the anomaly of a tragedy of blood, crude and revolting, in which the majority of the scenes are given an element of horseplay, or sport.

There is in this fact at least a suggestion of kinship to the *Hystorie of Hamblet*. And a close study of the text will show that the remoteness of the German version from Shakspeare’s versions is chiefly in seem-

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ing. To begin with, this very scene contains the Ghost's famous speeches from the 'cellarage,'—'Swear. Swear.'—those 'subterraneous speeches' which, in Shakspeare, Coleridge found 'hardly defensible'; and the comic treatment of the Ghost is recalled in Shakspeare's 'Well said, old Mole, can'st worke in the earth? so fast.' This phrase, and other similar ones in the same scene, Moberly calls 'a strange and baffling jest,' and Coleridge 'a wild transition to the ludicrous.' The German version taken as a whole, moreover, contains sufficient points in common with Shakspeare's versions to convince the critics that it is more nearly related to the first than to the second quarto, and to the lost version than to either. As most of the evidence of this is textual, we need not linger over it. There are one or two points of resemblance, however, that will later be extremely significant of the peculiar character of the lost play, and of the extent to which it was related to the first quarto.

In the German version, in the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia where the King

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and his Counsellor are secretly listening, Hamlet feigns madness as in the first quarto, but the treatment of the scene is as follows :

*Oph.* I pray your highness to take back the jewel which you presented to me.

*Ham.* What, girl! wouldst thou have a husband? Get thee away from me ; nay, come here. Hearken, girl, you young women do nothing but lead young fellows astray. Your beauty you buy of the apothecaries and peddlers. Listen, I will tell you a story. There was a cavalier in Anion who fell in love with a lady, who, to look at, was the goddess Venus. However, when bedtime came, the bride went first and began to undress herself. First, she took out an eye which had been set in very cunningly ; then her front teeth, made of ivory, so cleverly that the like were not to be seen ; then she washed herself, and off went all the paint with which she had smeared herself. At last, when the bridegroom came and thought to embrace her, the moment he saw her he started back, and thought it was a spectre. And thus it is that you deceive the young

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yet having striking points in common with the lost play;

fellows; therefore listen to me. But stay, girl! No, go to a nunnery, but not to a nunnery where two pairs of slippers lie at the bedside. [Exit.

'Cor. (*Polonius*). Is he not perfectly and veritably mad, gracious lord and King?

'King. Corambus, leave us. . . [Exit *Corambus*.] . . . It seems to us that this is not genuine madness, but rather a feigned madness.'

*Act II., Scene IV.*

This is hardly a literal rendering of the episode in the *Hystorie*; but in spirit it is precisely similar. In both versions Hamlet, in order to escape the espionage of the King, hoaxes Ophelia under the guise of madness; and in both the humour is, according to modern standards, indecent. The difference between the two, moreover, is merely that which must necessarily have existed between the narrative and the dramatic version of such an episode, for even in pre-Shaksperean England the passage in the *Hystorie* could not have been represented literally on the Stage. The scene is, to be sure, totally different in spirit from our conception of the parallel

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scene in the first quarto. Yet it has points of similarity that in the scientific study of literature pass for more than such arguments as appeal merely to the æsthetic or moral senses. It has certain striking words and phrases that recur almost literally in Shakspeare. 'Your beauty you buy of the apothecaries and peddlers,' is the Shakspearean Hamlet's 'I haue heard of your paintings too, God has giuen you one face, And you make your selues another.' 'To a Nunnery goe,' is identical; and there are other expressions, to be discussed later, which read like paraphrases of Shakspeare.

All this has an important bearing upon the lost play: It is beyond the remotest possibility that so many speeches should by mere chance be identical in both the versions to which it gave rise, the German and the Shakspearean *Hamlets*. The proof is positive that in letter and in spirit the lost play had vastly more in common with the German version than at first appears.

The three versions thus far discussed, the *Hystorie*, the lost play, and the German

*and being in  
reality closely  
akin to it:*

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*The points of similarity.*

play, form, it is now evident, a closely connected series. I have shown that in the first and third members of the series certain scenes were amusing which in the first quarto and second quarto appear quite serious. The hypothesis that in the intermediate version, the lost play, these scenes were amusing is, to say the least, worthy of further discussion.

*4. Shakspeare's first version :*

The evidence of Shakspeare's first quarto upon the lost play, and upon the comic element I have supposed in it, is now in order. The character of the first quarto as a whole may best be shown by stating first in what respects it resembles Shakspeare's final version, and then in what it differs from this. The two quartos are alike in seriousness and elevation of style. The story how Hamlet outwitted the factors of the King is told with fitting sobriety and probability. The Ghost is essentially a poetic creation, and full of ghostly dignity. Hamlet's pretended madness strikes us as shrewd and trenchant ; but apparently those scenes in which it gives rise to comic or amusing situations have to do only



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with Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern—characters feebly developed in the German play—and with Osric, upon whom Hamlet repeats in a bettered form the mad jests which in the German version he played off on a certain Phantasm. When Hamlet speaks to Ophelia, it is apparently with predominant seriousness and tragic effect. In only one passage is there the least suggestion of comedy.

*Its resemblance to the final version;*

*Ham.* Where's thy father?

*Ofel.* At home my lord.

*Ham.* For Gods sake let the doores be shut on him,

He may play the foole no where but in his Owne house: to a Nunnery goe.' *Line 873.*

The fact that Polonius is 'close in the study,' straining to catch what Hamlet says, gives this speech an inevitably comic aspect. Still under no circumstances could the scene as a whole in the first quarto strike us, from a modern point of view, as anything but essentially tragic.

Having conjectured that in the old play this and other similar scenes bore a largely comic character, we are forced, at least for the

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present, to assume that Shakspeare sacrificed this almost completely. This supposition, it must be admitted, is confirmed by the fact that in Hamlet's scenes of feigned madness with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—not found in the German versions—and with Polonius—barely suggested there—we find enough of wit and of comedy of character to compensate for the predominant seriousness of the once comic scenes.

*its points of  
difference;*

Passing to the differences between Shakspeare's two quartos, we find that in the first quarto, though the incidents and scenes are the same, the phrasing is far less finished and beautiful. The character of Hamlet, moreover, is fully conceived only where he is in action. The contemplative side is barely suggested. In fine, the first quarto, though a very good acting play, lacks all that makes *Hamlet Hamlet*. By no possibility can we take the Prince to be more than a dignified stage rendering of the crude Hamblet of the *Hystorie*. The first quarto, as several of the critics have said, is to be regarded not so much as an early bit of Shakspeare's workmanship as the

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work of a very inferior artist. Clarke and Wright conclude that it is 'an older play,' composed of a distinctly tragic treatment of the incidents of both the German version and the *Hystorie*; but that it is still 'in a transition state; . . . it was undergoing a remodelling, but had not received more than the first rough touches of the great master's hand.' If we knew no other Shakspearean version than the first quarto, there would be little or nothing paradoxical in supposing that the most serious episodes in which Hamlet moves had, in the lost play upon which it was founded, been wilfully buffooned.

*its close relationship to the lost play.*

We have now at hand the chief facts that bear upon the lost play. The main features of its source, the *Hystorie*, we found, were a series of incidents such as a dramatist would be likely to choose for a tragedy of blood; and the allusions to the lost play strengthen the supposition. There was no suggestion of a comic underplot; but there was interwoven with the tragic incidents a series of partly amusing situations brought about by the fact that the hero, though sane,

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was expected to act the madman ; and these were of a character to supply the place of comic underplot in the lost play. In the German *Hamlet*, which was based upon the lost play, we found that the bloodily tragic incidents,—contained also, presumably, in the lost play,—were debased and considerably augmented. Moreover, the comic treatment of all phases of Hamlet's pretended madness, which, judging from the character of the *Hystorie*, might have afforded the comic relief to the lost play, was likewise reproduced. Upon this fact we founded the hypothesis that they were similarly treated in the lost play. When we came to Shakspeare's first quarto—the lost play remodelled—we found the same bloodily tragic incidents ; but they were treated with greater sobriety and artistic reserve ; while several of the scenes which, in the *Hystorie* and the German version, had been used to enliven the gloom, no longer appeared comic. Still even in these scenes there were distinct traces of the old comic treatment.

From the data thus summarised no con-

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clusion is admissible that would not make the lost play a tragedy of blood. Nor does it take the ghost of the lost play to tell us this. The evidence as to the lost play summarized. A number of the critics have observed that *Hamlet* presents an aspect which throws it back into the school of *The Spanish Tragedy*; and the most recent work on this subject, Gregor Sarrazin's *Thomas Kyd and his Circle*, which has come to me since writing the foregoing, proves beyond reasonable doubt that the lost play was by Kyd; was conceived as a companion piece to *Feronimo* and *The Spanish Tragedy*; and contained, in a slightly altered form, the events and situations of both of these plays. Likewise no conclusion is admissible that would make the prince Hamlet of the lost play anything but a person who feigned madness to escape the jealousy of a usurping uncle; and our evidence would forbid our regarding this feigned madness as of such a nature that it could not be turned to comic effect in the less tragic scenes. Even on this point we might say to the ghost of the lost play: 'Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!' for we have the combined

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testimony of Dr. Maginn and Dr. Johnson that this is the case even with Shakspeare's final version. 'I doubt if . . . the English vulgar . . . could abide [Hamlet] without . . . having Polonius buffooned for him, and, to no small extent, Hamlet himself; as he always was whenever I saw the part played, and as the *great critic*, Dr Johnson, would seem to think he ought to be. For he says, "the pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth!!!"'

The really significant facts in the evidence gathered thus far relate to the comic aspect of Hamlet's madness in those scenes which in our familiar version appear purely tragic. In the *Hystorie*, Hamblet's most bestial pretence of madness amused 'pages and ruffling courtiers,' and in the episode with the 'beawtifull lady' he used his sham madness as a stalking-horse for a most outrageous bit of hoaxing. In the German version, the scene founded upon this episode with the 'beawtifull lady' bears a precisely similar spirit of vulgar mirth; and the action of the scene differs only as it would neces-

*Hamlet's madness everywhere comic.*

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sarily differ in a dramatic handling. In the first quarto, although the spirit is apparently quite different, there is in this scene and elsewhere a close verbal relationship with the German version; and there is also some slight trace of comedy. All this suggests my main hypothesis, and at the same time powerfully substantiates it, namely, that in the lost play Hamlet's feigned madness bore a comic aspect in certain of those scenes which, as they appear in the modern Hamlet, strike us as most deeply tragic.

This hypothesis presumes in Elizabethan audiences an attitude toward acts of cruelty and insanity which is incredible to any one brought up amid the sensibility of modern life. Yet there is much evidence that it is thoroughly in accord with the characteristics of Elizabethan England and of the Elizabethan Drama. Until this state of things is made clear, the discussion of the comic element in Shakspeare's first quarto must wait.

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## II

THE BRU-  
TALITY OF  
ELIZABETHAN  
ENGLAND

It is a fact too often forgotten that bear baiting was a national sport with our forefathers, and that the merriment of their dinner tables was supplied by idiots and madmen. Hentzner, a German who visited England in 1598, describes the manner of bear baiting.

‘There is still another place,’ he records, ‘built in the form of a Theatre, which serves for the baiting of Bulls and Bears, they are fastned behind, and then worried by great English bull-dogs; but not without great risque to the dogs, from the horns of the one, and the teeth of the other; and it sometimes happens they are killed upon the spot; fresh ones are immediately supplied in the places of those that are wounded, or tired. To this entertainment, there often follows that of whipping a blinded bear, which is performed by five or six men, standing circularly with whips, which they exercise upon him without any mercy, as he cannot escape from them because of his chain;

*Hentzner's  
‘Travels.’*



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he defends himself with all his force and skill, throwing down all who come within his reach, and are not active enough to get out of it, and tearing the whips out of their hands, and breaking them.'

Such were the pastimes of our ancestors; but whether the brutality of the spectacle *Bear baiting.* made serious sport, like the unexampled physical strain of an University boat-race, or whether it provoked laughter, is not stated. In the bear-baiting it seems natural to assume that the element of serious sport predominated. As for the spectacle of five or six men scuffling and tussling with a blinded bear, this supposition scarcely holds. Spectators to whom the combats of dogs and tied bears was serious sport could hardly have been above hearty laughter when an unwary fellow was sent sprawling by a cuff on the side of the head.

About the humorous delight in madmen there is no possibility of doubt. A passage already quoted from the *Hystorie* shows that Hamlet's madness was considered fit sport for 'pages and ruffling courtiers;' and in a

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*The Court Fool  
a bonâ fide  
idiot.*

quaint volume called '*A Nest of Ninnies, Simply of themselues without Compound*,' we have superabundant evidence that partial and even total insanity amused the Elizabethans. The book is by one Robert Armin,—a professional, who was certainly a member of Shakspeare's company, and probably at times took the part of Dogberry. A thorough understanding of the position which the idiots Armin describes occupied in the Elizabethan household can be attained—if at all—only by reading the entire volume; but the following siftings must serve.

'A kinde gentleman . . . had a foole, *Leonard* they call him. . . . The Gentleman . . . hauing bought a goodly fayre Hawke, brought her home, being not a little proud of his penny-worth, and at Supper to other Gentlemen, fell a praysing of her. . . . *Leonard* standing by with his finger in his mouth, as it was his custome, often hearing them praise the goodnesse of the Hawke, thought indeede they had meant for goodnesse being farre better meate then a Turkey or a Swan, was very desirous to eate of the same :

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and vnknowne goes downe, and sodainely from the perch snatch the Hawke, and hauing wrung off herneck, begins to besiedge that good morsell, but with so good a courage, that the feathers had almost choakt him : but there lay my friend *Leonard* in a lamentable taking. Well, the Hawke was mist, and the deede was found, the Maister was fecht, and al men might see the Hawk, feathers and all not very wel digested: there was no boote to bid runne for drams to driue downe this vndigested moddicome : the Gentleman of the one side, cryed hang the Foole, the Foole on the other side cryed not, but made signes that his Hawke was not so good as hee did praise her for : and though the Gentleman loued his Hawke, yet he loued the Foole aboue : being enforced rather to laugh at his simplicitie, then to vere at his losses sodainely : Being glad to make himselfe merry, jested on it ever after.'

*Armin's 'Nest of Ninnies.'*

A more pitiable fool was Jack Miller, whom Armin says he knew personally. This Miller stuttered frightfully, and one of his most ludicrous performances was to sing songs full of difficult consonants. Once when he was amusing a

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table of 'Gallants and Gentlewomen, almost the state of the Country,' there was a lady present who seems to have had our modern sense of the impropriety of laughing. That she was very far in advance of her century, however, is evident in Armin's narrative of the way her sense of propriety was brought into ridicule.

*A lady in  
advance of  
her Century.*

'The Gallants and Gentlewomen . . . especially . . . entreated him for his new speach of the Pees : which he began in such manner to speake, with driueling and stuttering, that they began mightely to laugh : inso-much that one proper Gentlewoman among the rest, because shee would not seeme too immodest with laughing : for such is the humour of many, that thinke to make all, when God knowes they marre all : so shee, straining her selfe, though inwardly she laughed hartely, gaue out such an earnest of her modesty, that all the Table rung of it. Who is that, sayes one? Not I, sayes another : but by her cheeks you might find guilty *Gilbert*, where he had hid the brush. . . . Thus simple *Jack* made mirth to all, made the wisest laugh, but to this day gathered little wit to himselfe.'

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In the facts here brought forward there is nothing new; but any one who has read far in criticism of the Elizabethan drama will testify that an analysis has not yet been made of the archaic taste in comedy which such primitive humor implied. I have already shown by the internal evidence of the three early versions of the story that in the lost play the (to us) cruel acts of madness, in such scenes as the Hamlet-Ophelia scene for instance, were probably meant by the playwright to be amusing. It is obvious in the evidence just presented that such a treatment would have been precisely in accordance with the tastes of the Elizabethans. Henceforth I shall take it for proved that, in the lost play, the Hamlet-Ophelia scene was treated with at least one eye to comic effect. Those who are still unconvinced I shall leave to consider parallel scenes, to be presented by and by, which were written by Shakspeare's contemporaries, and even by Shakspeare himself. For the present I shall attempt to estimate the influence of the lost play in general, and of the scenes of archaic comedy in particular, upon the first quarto.

*Hamlet's madness comic in the lost play.*

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## III

### THE INFLU- ENCE OF SHAKSPERE'S SOURCES

The influence of the lost play would, of course, have been very slight indeed if Shakspeare were in the habit of remodelling carefully and thoroughly the plots upon which he worked. If, however, he were accustomed to work hastily, merely rephrasing scenes which he found already made to his hand, the influence would have been far from slight. The evidence on this point is fortunately well authenticated and digested. That Shakspeare took his plots from older plays and novels, and often took them *in toto*, is a commonplace of the primers. All but two of the thirty-seven extant plays are known to have been thus constructed. The hasty and hap-hazard way in which Elizabethan playwrights worked is also well known. Henslowe's famous diary attests that the audiences of the time required a new play about every eighteen days on an average, including Sundays, and that the rapidity with which plays were written is most remarkable

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This is shown beyond dispute by the portions of the diary where, among other charges, Henslowe registers the sums paid to playwrights, the dates of the payment, and the authors who received the money. Nothing was more common than for two and even three or four dramatists to work together on one play. All this is as far as possible from the manner of writing such modern plays or novels as are in the least comparable with the best work of the Elizabethans.

*The rewriting  
of plays hasty  
and hap-  
azard.*

It is also fairly well established that Shakspeare often retouched and developed his work after the first 'run.' Different quartos of several of the plays show various readings which indicate this; and of two plays at least, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*, we have two widely different Shakspearean versions. This evidence is particularly significant in view of the fact that no play was ever willingly given out in print until it had died a natural death on the boards. That we have even these two first drafts is due to accident, for they were pirated, as were several of the quartos that give various readings. If the pirates had been

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*The reason for  
the influence  
of Shakspeare's  
sources.*

willing and able to print the first version of all the dramas, we should probably find that it was Shakspeare's custom in working over old plays, first to make a thorough revision, and then to rewrite and improve this if its success on the boards warranted. Under such conditions as these, only quite new plays could be written, as with us, in accordance with a consciously precise structure, a settled conception of character, an idea or purpose which moulds the events: the mass of the playwright's work sprang, with only such coherence and form as he might import into it, from the plot or scenes that formed his material.

Such a method in writing would be sufficient in itself to show that the influence of the lost play upon the first quarto must have been very strong; but there is still greater reason why the dramatist should have followed the earlier play, in the known prestige of the story. The prose Hamlet had probably been familiar to Shakspeare's audience for upward of thirty years; and a new edition was put out five years after Shakspeare's play was printed. The lost play likewise is known to



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have been popular for at least thirteen years ; to what extent is shown in the fact that its peculiar phrases crop out in contemporary allusions years after they were altered in Shakspeare's first quarto. Let the reader ask himself now how he feels when a new interpretation of any well known personage in literature is presented. Does he relish the adventurer Columbus, the moralist Macchiavelli, or the immoral Washington ? No other writer, moreover, is so thoroughly at the mercy of the traditions and caprices of his contemporaries as the dramatist. And Shakspeare was no exception. Play upon play might be cited, showing that for reasons of haste or policy, or both, he left whole episodes that savor of the cruder aspects of the Elizabethan drama unrefined.

*The prestige  
of the pre-  
Shakspearean  
Hamlets.*

The crudities in Hamlet are not far to seek. It is a significant fact that more than one of the most clear-sighted of the critics have found the Prince anything but the 'sweet' or 'gentle' youth of the effusive commentators. Dr. Johnson says: Hamlet 'plays the madman most when he treats

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*The crudities  
in Hamlet*

Ophelia with so much rudeness, which seems to be useless and wanton cruelty.' And Steevens adds, 'He defers his purpose [of revenge] till he can find an opportunity of taking his uncle when he is least prepared for death, that he may insure damnation to his soul. Though he assassinated Polonius by accident, yet he deliberately procures the execution of his school-fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. . . . Their end (as he declares in subsequent conversation with Horatio) gives him no concern, for they obtruded themselves into the service, and he thought he had a right to destroy them. From his brutal conduct toward Ophelia he is not less accountable for her distraction and death. He interrupts the funeral designed in honor of this lady. . . . He insults the brother of the dead, and boasts of an affection for his sister, which, before, he had denied to her face.' That either Dr. Johnson or Steevens presents a sympathetic view of Hamlet's character few will be hardy enough to insist; but any candid reader will admit that every one of their charges, like either of

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the opposing theories with regard to Shakspeare's spiritual ideas, is substantiated by the facts of the story; and that these facts have never been satisfactorily reconciled.

If, now, we consider the manifold consequences of the growth of the play through the successive versions, a few, at least, of the inconsistencies will be accounted for. Take, for instance, the Ghost episode. This, it will be remembered, does not occur in the *Hystorie*. Its introduction into the lost play is doubtless due to Thomas Kyd, and sprang, in all probability, like that of Andrea's Ghost into Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, from the desire to make a telling scene, and incidentally to emphasize the hero's duty of revenge. How striking the scene proved in the lost play is witnessed by the constant recurrence of the Ghost's phrase, 'Hamlet, Revenge!' in the books of the times. When, now, the prince was made the instrument of a revengeful spirit, it is evident that he had to be represented as a creature of far greater dignity than the Hamblet of the *Hystorie*. In an acting drama, too, the guise of clownish

*an inheritance from the tragedy of blood.*

*The development of the Ghost episode.*

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imbecility, which was made so much of in the prose narrative, would, in the long run, be monotonous. His demonstrations of insanity had to be made chiefly mental. Thus, for a double reason, Hamlet's character was raised and invigorated. When, now, this dignified and acute Hamlet of the lost play had received his commands from the Ghost, and was primed with his revengeful purpose, it was evident that he must be checked, or the play would end with the first two acts. Two expedients were hit upon to delay the killing of the King. The first was the question of the honesty of the Ghost, which involved the play within the play. The second was the scene where Hamlet surprises the King at his prayers. Here it is shown that, to make his filial revenge complete, he must, according to the obsolete theology of the time, kill the King

about some act

That has no relish of salvation in't,  
because

He took my father grossly, full of bread,  
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.

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The modern explanation of these truculent lines is that, with instinctive horror of bloodshed, Hamlet was practicing self-deception; but not until Shakspeare's final version, when Hamlet became so highly self-conscious and intellectual, can this explanation bear the slightest pertinence. The cruel cunning is precisely in character with the Hamlet of the *Hystorie*, and likewise with Kyd's Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*. It was doubtless highly characteristic also of the Hamlet of the lost play. Yet, even in Shakspeare's first quarto, Hamlet, when he appears at his best, is gentle enough to rise above the cruelty of this revenge. His character thus bears two distinctly contradictory phases—one a remnant of the Prince of the lost play, the other a foreshadowing of the Hamlet that was to come. That Shakspeare was fully aware of this double nature we need not question; but we must also keep in mind that if he were to remove the seat of the trouble, the entire scene of the King's prayer, one of the already too few explanations of Hamlet's delay, would be sacrificed. Thus

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the inevitable result of bringing in the Ghost was to saddle upon the Prince—eventually so gentle—one of the most diabolical sentiments the mind of man can frame.

*The history of  
Hamlet's mad-  
ness.*

The history of Hamlet's madness presents another case of the same kind. In all the pre-Shakspearean forms of the story there was clearly no real insanity ; and the tradition on this point was so strong that it would have been a dramatic impropriety to make Hamlet really mad. In the majority of the scenes of Shakspeare's first quarto, consequently, there is not the slightest doubt that Hamlet is pretending the madman : the entire action of the play rests upon this fact. Under Shakspeare's remodelling, however, his mind has become extremely acute and sensitive, and perhaps morbid ; and the mental strain he is under is overpowering. He has lost the cold and cunning 'subtiltie' of the Hamlet of the *Hystorie*, and is vested with a passionate trenchancy of wit. As a result, it is not always clear that he is perfectly sane. On this point accordingly, as well as on the point of the gentleness of his spirit, Shak-

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spere's happiest additions to the old tragedy of blood were precisely contradictory to its vital structure as a drama. Wherever Hamlet is in action his character dates back to the lost play: the Shakspearean element has to do almost exclusively with the reflective, imaginative, humane traits of his portraiture. Yet even if it ever occurred to Shakspeare that the scenes where Hamlet was most highly wrought intellectually were not consonant with the scenes where he was more coldly playing the madman, it could scarcely have troubled him; for his audience was nothing if not uncritical. In point of fact, it was two hundred years before serious doubt of Hamlet's sanity was aroused; and even yet comparatively few students of Shakspeare are convinced that he is really mad. To reconstruct the whole play so as to bring it into harmony with the refined traits lately developed in Hamlet's character would have been only less out of the question than to remove the scene where he surprised the King at his prayers. Hamlet's pretended madness caused too much mirth to the

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vulgar, to be dispensable from a tragedy without underplot.

*The great  
scene with  
Ophelia.*

Hamlet's cruelty to Ophelia, however, is to be accounted for only by reference to that Elizabethan attitude toward suffering and insanity which we found in the lost play. If I can show that to Shakspeare's audiences these scenes possessed an element of now-archaic comedy, many contradictory facts of the Prince's portraiture may be accounted for. In order to show this scientifically, it is necessary to ascertain the precise attitude of the Elizabethans toward those scenes in their drama in which cruelty is most evidently treated in the bear-whipping spirit, and madness after the fashion of the gallants and gentlewomen in Armin's anecdote.



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IV

That no subject was too high for this  
archaic comedy is apparent in the Chester  
Miracle play of *Noah's Flood*, which was  
written in the latter half of the fourteenth  
century. It describes the difficulty Noah and  
his sons had in inducing his wife to embark.

GRUESOME  
COMEDY IN  
THE OLD  
DRAMA

*i. Noah's Flood.*

*'Noye . . .*

Wyffe, we shall in this vessell be kepte,  
My children and thou I woulde ye in lepte.

*Noyes Wiffe*

In fayth, Noye, I hade as leffe thou slepte!  
For all thy frynishe fare,  
I will not doe after thy reade.

*Noye*

Good Wyffe, doe nowe as I thee bydde.

*Noyes Wiffe*

Be Christe! not or I see more neede,  
Though thou stande all daye and stare.

*Noye*

Lorde, that wemen be crabbed aye,  
And non are meke I dare well saye;  
That is well seene by me to daye,  
In witnessse of you ichone.'

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With this astute observation to the audience Noah contents himself until the ark is finished and all the animals are on board.

*'Noye*

Wiffe, come in : why standes thou their?  
Thou arte ever frowarde, I dare well sweare;  
Come in, one Godes name! halfe tyme yt  
For feare leste that we drowne. [were,

*Noyes Wiffe*

Yea, sir, sette up youer saile,  
And rowe fourth with evill haile,  
For withouten fayle  
I will not oute of this towne;  
But I have my gossippes everyechone,  
One foote further I will not gone: . . .  
They loven me full wel, by Christe!  
But thou lett them into thy cheiste,  
Elles rowe nowe wher thy leiste,  
And gette thee a newe wiffe.

*Noye*

Seme, sonne, loe! thy mother is wrawe;  
Be God, such another I doe not knowe.

*Sem*

Father, I shall fetch her in, I trowe,  
Withoutten anye fayle.'

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Here follows a sharp dispute, and probably a scuffle, in which Noah's wife is apparently by no means worsted. At any rate she gathers her gossips about her and sings a jolly drinking song. 'Jeffatte' remonstrates with no avail, and finally 'Sem' carries her bodily into the ark. 'Welckome, wiffe, into this botte,' says Noah. 'Have thou that for thy note!' she replies, evidently striking him as she is carried up the gang-plank. 'Ha, ha! marye, this is hotte!' Noah laughs good-naturedly. Then they all join in a genuinely pious song, the waters close in, and God ends the play with a long speech in praise of Noah. That our forefathers accepted such reverend personages in so mirthful a farce, makes it appear less improbable that they managed to get more or less fun out of Hamlet and Ophelia.

A somewhat more complex instance is presented in the tragic end of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, which was written and acted during Shakspeare's early manhood. Barabas, the Jew, personifies the greed for gold; and, in the opening scene of the play at least, appears

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splendidly opulent and powerful. Still, since he is a Jew, he can only be an object of hatred and abhorrence to an Elizabethan audience. He goes through four acts doing deeds of cruelty and perfidy; and in the fifth act, as every one must expect, he is caught up with. Relying on the aid of the Governor of Malta, he is about to put an end to Calymath, traitorously, in the following manner:

2. Marlowe's  
'Jew of  
Malta.'

'*Bar.* . . Now as for *Calymath* and his consorts,

Here haue I made a dainty Gallery,  
The floore whereof, this Cable being cut,  
Doth fall asunder; so that it doth sinke  
Into a deepe pit past recouery . . .

A warning-peece shall be shot off from the  
Tower,

To giue thee knowledge when to cut the  
cord,

And fire the house; say, will not this be  
braue? . . .

*Enter Calymath and Bashawes.* . . .

*Bar.* Will't please thee, mighty *Selim-Calymath*,

To ascend our homely stayres?'

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But the Governor is not to be counted on.

'Gov. Stay, *Calymath*;

For I will shew thee greater curtesie  
Than *Barabas* would haue affoorded thee.

*Kni.* Sound a charge there!

[*A charge sounded within. Ferneze cuts the cord: the floor of the gallary gives way, and Barabas falls into a caldron.*]

*Bar.* Helpe, helpe me! Christians, helpe.

*Fern.* See, *Calymath*, this was deuis'd  
for thee!' *Ed. 1633, fol. K2; or Act V., Sc. VI.*

This is a case of the biter bitten. The hatred and abhorrence which *Barabas* has aroused earlier in the play are allayed by this bit of poetic justice; and the piece ends in a burst of savagely triumphant mirth. The *Jew of Malta* is the direct prototype of Shakspeare's *Merchant of Venice*, which was first called the *Jew of Venice*.

Instances of the comic aspect of insanity on the Elizabethan stage are not far to seek. In Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's son has been murdered by one Lorenzo, and Hieronimo 'runnes lunaticke' with grief and the desire for revenge.

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*'Enter two Portingales, and Hieronimo  
meets them. . . .*

2. You could not tell vs if his sonne were  
there?

*Hier.* Who, my Lord, *Lorenzo*.

1. I, sir.

*He goes in at one dore, and comes out at  
another.*

*Hier.* . . . There, in a brazen Caldron  
fixt by *Ioue*,

In his fell wrath vpon a sulphur flame:  
Your selues shall finde *Lorenzo* bathing him,  
In boyling lead and blood of innocents.

1. Ha, ha, ha.

*Hier.* Ha, ha, ha: why ha, ha, ha.  
Forwell good ha, ha, ha. *Exit.*

2. Doubtlesse this man is passing luna-  
ticke.'

*Ed. 1602, fol. G 3; Ed. Dodsley-Hazlitt, p. 106.*

Kyd's Hamlet could have been no more  
above such a scene than his companion figure,  
Hieronimo.

A more amusing instance is in the comic  
underplot of Middleton's tragedy of *The*  
<sup>4. Middleton's</sup> *Changeling*.<sup>5</sup> Alibius, 'a Doctor, who under-

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takes the cure of fools and madmen,' is guarding a beautiful young wife. Antonio, 'a pretended changeling,' and Franciscus, 'a counterfeit madman,' have assumed their disguises to gain entrance to Alibius's home. The situation is roughly the same as in the comic underplot of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Spanish Curate*, where Leandro gains access to the Notary's wife, Amaranta, by becoming the notary's law pupil. In Middleton's underplot, however, the scene is in Bedlam. Fools and madmen go through their antics on the stage; while among them the two young bucks vie with each other in simulating madness, and in assailing in the interims the mad-house keeper's wife. To give an adequate idea of the kind of comedy this produces, it would be necessary to quote the entire underplot. Roughly we have here, on the one hand, a nest of genuine ninnies, like Armin's Leonard; and on the other, a couple of gallants pretending madness for their personal ends, like the Hamlet of the lost play. Although the tragic scenes of *The Changeling* make one of the most effective dramas out-

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side the covers of Shakspeare, this mad underplot was so popular that it usurped the title of the play.

5. Webster's  
'Duchess of  
Malfi.'

The madmen in the tragic climax of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, a play belonging to the later school of tragedies of blood, present a most difficult and complex problem. The Duchess' brother, Ferdinand, has separated her violently from her husband, and is putting her to death in a darkened room, with various ingenious tortures.

'*Ferd.* . . Here's a hand,  
To which you haue vow'd much loue : the  
Ring vpon't *gives her a dead*  
You gaue. *mans hand.'*

The Duchess supposes that her husband has returned and is standing beside her.

'*Duch.* I affectionately kisse it : . . .  
You are very cold.  
I feare you are not well after your trauell :  
Hah? lights : oh horrible :  
*Ferd.* Let her haue lights enough *Exit.'*

*Ed. 1623, Act III., Scene I.*



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The madmen are introduced in the next scene.

*Servant.* I am come to tell you,  
Your brother hath entended you some  
sport :

A great Physitian, when the Pope was  
sicke

Of a deepe mellancholly, presented him  
With seuerall sorts of mad-men, which  
wilde obiect

(Being full of change, and sport,) forc'd  
him to laugh,

And so th' impost-hume broke : the selfe  
same cure,

The Duke intends on you. . . .

There's a mad Lawyer, and a secular  
Priest,

A Doctor that hath forfeited his wits

By ieaousie : an Astrologian,

That in his workes, sayd such a day o'  
th' moneth,

Should be the day of doome ; and,  
fayling of't,

Ran mad : . . . '

The madmen enter. . . .

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1. Come on Sir, I will lay the law to you.
2. Oh, rather lay a coraziue, the law will eate to the bone.
3. He that drinckes but to satisfie nature is damn'd.

4. If I had my glasse here, I would shew a sight should make

All the women here, call me mad Doctor,

1. What's he, a rope-maker?

2. No, no, no, a snuffling knaue, that while he shewes the

Tombes, will haue his hand in a wench's placket.

3. Woe, to the Caroach, that brought home my wife from

The Masque, at three a clocke in the morning, it had a large

Feather-bed in it.' *Actus IIII., Scena II.*

After this comes the death of the Duchess—perhaps the most brutally tremendous scene in English literature.

Now what was the dramatic purpose of this episode of the madmen? To the modern mind it appears just such another savage persecution of the Duchess as the episode

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of the dead man's hand. To the Duchess certainly it can be nothing else. We should have to assume that to the audience too it was simply that, except for one fact: When the madmen come in they *are* 'full of change and sport'—characteristic Elizabethan sport, which, terrible as it was supposed to be to the Duchess, could not fail to amuse the audience. The difference in the point of view of the Duchess and of the audience is aptly illustrated by a passage in the very same play. Delio brings Julia news of her husband's approach.

*'Del.* I neuer knew man, and beast, of a  
horse, and a knight,

So weary of each other, if he had had  
a good backe,

He would haue vndertooke to haue borne  
his horse,

His breech was so pittifully sore.

Julia. *Your laughter,*

*Is my pittty.'*

*Actus II., Scena IIII.*

So with the Duchess. In spite of the sight of her suffering, the jests of the madmen are precisely of a nature to amuse the audience.

Consider now the dramatic situation.

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The playwright is on the verge of one of the most horribly affecting scenes in literature, but the spectators have already been sated with horrors. There must be a laughing spell to rest them for what is to come, yet the playwright must not break the continuity of the climax by bringing in a purely comic scene. As Webster solves this dramatic problem, the Duchess is represented all the time in extreme torture. Nevertheless, the madmen, who are her 'pitty,' are the 'laughter' of the audience; though doubtless the audience never entirely forgets the horror of her situation.

The general correspondence between the brutally serious side of the plays reviewed, and the brutal comedy of the scenes that were evidently intended to relieve the strain of continued tragedy, can scarcely have escaped attention; and the reason for this correspondence is not far to seek. The tragedy of blood had an atmosphere of its own, where not only was the brutally comic in place, but where refined comedy would have been a positive fault in chiaroscuro.

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The scenes I have instanced cannot be fully understood without a careful reading of the plays in which they occur. Indeed, a thorough study of this subject would carry one much farther. I have selected these few passages because they occur in the most celebrated of the old dramas. Similar ones may be found in almost any old writer. For the comic aspect of physical torture, consult the fight between Gammer Chat and Gammer Gurton in *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. The incident of Bajazeth and his cage in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is also suggestive. For the comic treatment of madness, consult the fifth act of Dekker's *Honest Whore*.

It is yet to be made evident that Shakspeare would be guilty of the grossness of his contemporaries. The first part of *Henry IV.* 6. Falstaff in 'Henry IV.' will give a good instance. Prince Hal has done the last rites of chivalry over the body of his vanquished rival, Hotspur, and has left him with a speech, the pathos and ideal manhood of which are beyond praise. Yet no sooner is he off the stage than Falstaff rises from the ground where he has been shamming dead,

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speaks twenty lines of buffoonery, stabs Hotspur's body, and finally 'takes up Hotspur on his back' and lugs him off the stage. On the next page he claims the honor of killing Hotspur. 'There is Percy,' he says to Hal, '*(throwing the body down)*: if your father will do me any honor, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself.' The Hamlet of the first quarto could scarcely have been more sacred from this sort of fun than Hotspur.

The same sacrilege may be found in *King Lear* and in the *Merchant of Venice*. An admirable exposition of this is in Professor Barrett Wendell's lectures on Shakspeare, first delivered at Harvard University in 1892-3, and since published, the brief manuscript notes of which he has kindly permitted me to quote. They give chiefly the results. The sum total of the evidence of these statements would involve an essay within the essay.

7. '*King Lear*.' '*Lear* seems originally to have been popular. This I conceive can hardly have been for the reasons that make it perennially great. As a mere guess, I venture to suggest two grounds

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for its popularity which would have appealed to an Elizabethan audience, and would quite fail to appeal to an audience of to-day. The first is an almost ultimate chance for sonorous rant, offered by the part of Lear; the second is the conventionally comic element which the Elizabethan audience recognized in insanity. These guesses I purposely mention and emphasize. True or false, they certainly serve to recall a true fact that we constantly lose sight of, the essential difference of Shakspeare's world from ours.

'*Lear* is after all originally contemporary with the old tragedies of blood, and not twenty years removed from Tamburlaine himself.

'The title of the quarto of *Lear* emphasizes "the unfortunate life of Edgar" and "the sudden and assumed humours of Tom of Bedlam" (that is of Edgar) just as the title of the quarto of *Henry IV.* emphasizes Falstaff; and of *Henry V.*, Falstaff and Pistol. Edgar, I imagine, was really conceived by the author to be comic, to lighten the situation throughout, and as the play was popular I think the audience must have taken this view.'

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An actor, now living, who took the part of Edgar in Booth's company, once assured me that in Texas, and other places remote from the centres of culture, his part was often laughed at, though he spared no effort to bring out its tragedy.

Of Shylock, Professor Wendell says :

8. *'The Merchant of Venice.'*

'His . . . treatment by the very Christians he has obliged, naturally arouses all the evil in him. His revenge is wholly comprehensible—not so to me, is the contemptuous brutality with which he finally meets.

'To understand this we must deliberately revive some dead sentiments of the world,—its ecclesiastically fostered abhorrence of usury and of Jews. Vastly foreign these data of Elizabethan England to a commercial and a sentimentally philanthropic age and people like our own. But even when we have . . . tried to put ourselves in the place of Shakspeare's audiences, we have not done enough. To me, at all events, the treatment of Shylock as we conceive him now-a-days, remains, in spite of my imaginative efforts, sympathetically



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repellant. And so, the whole effect of the play remains artistically unsatisfying. I am asked to give full sympathy to people whose conduct is ultimately outrageous. Where is the trouble? As a dramatic artist Shakspeare can hardly be believed to have intended such an effect as this. Is the Hebraic Shylock of our stage really "the Jew that Shakspeare drew?"

'This Hebraic Shylock is reputed to date from Macklin's performance in 1741, which Pope described in that doggerel couplet. And even Macklin dared not discard the traditional blood-red wig of the traditional Judas of the miracle plays. Before his time, so far as we can learn, the character was traditionally treated as low comedy. Clearly this old conception does not fit the lines. The character as a character is a great, serious Shakspearean creation, which may be studied and reasoned about psychologically almost like a human being. In literature, at all events, we consider rather what people are than what they seem like. In studying character we are instinctively inclined to neglect the various bodily forms in which character may mani-

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fest itself. Is not this perhaps the trouble here?

'Elizabethan England was childishly brutal. . . . Elizabethan England held lunacy highly comic. It saw rather the grotesqueness than the horror of physical torture. Is not what so repels our sympathy, after all, not so much the inherent brutality of the treatment Shylock receives, as the application of such treatment to the kind of Shylock whom we see receive it? This is a grand Hebraic figure, smacking of the prophets. Would not a mean, cringing, "jewy" Shylock—reminding one of the pimps and pawnbrokers who to-day make up the Jewish rabble,—repel sympathy still—for all Shakspeare's sympathetic psychology? Surely it would have done so in that age so foreign to our fine philanthropy—the brutally childish England of Elizabeth. And some such childish, unfeeling conception must in my opinion have been the real conception of Shakspeare. As an artistic playwright, he could not have meant our sympathy to go with Shylock. No rendering of Shylock, then, that renders

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the part essentially so noble as to be seriously sympathetic, can, in my opinion, make his fate artistically tolerable. I know of few facts that emphasize more forcibly than this the ultimate remoteness from our own world not only of Elizabethan England, but also of Shakspeare, the Elizabethan playwright.'

The actual growth in Hamlet's character from Kyd's lost play to Shakspeare's final version was precisely similar to the growth in the interpretation of Shylock. Even in Shakspeare's time, as has been pointed out, it so far upset the balance between comedy and tragedy as to necessitate the introduction of new comic scenes in the first quarto.

Thus far I have tacitly assumed that the comic delight in physical suffering and insanity is Elizabethan, and archaic. It was distinctly characteristic of Elizabeth's England, but not exclusively so. There is abundant evidence that it existed in post-Shakspearean literature. A notable instance is Milton's description of the fate of popish sinners—'eremites and friars' in the third book of *Paradise Lost*. And in at least two *Gruesome comedy since Shakspeare.* *Milton.*

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modern plays extreme physical suffering—a villain crushed under an elevator, and the accidental application of a mustard plaster to a bald head—has been introduced as comedy.

*Modern plays,  
e'tc.*

An excellent modern instance of the delight in madmen is to be found in Scott's *Antiquary*; and, though extinct on the stage, it exists to-day among uneducated men and in almost every robust boy. In rural districts when idiots are at large it is by no means uncommon to see them the friend and laughing stock of the neighbourhood, precisely as were Armin's ninnies.

This treatment of insanity finds a very suggestive parallel in our conventional attitude toward that temporary insanity, drunkenness. This, though we usually treat it essentially as tragedy, we often present at first in a largely comic aspect. Examples may be found in the novels of so late a writer as Mr. Howells. For instance, the man who is drunk on board the Aroostook; Bartley Hubbard, in the *Modern Instance*; and the scene in *Annie Kilburn* where the lawyer Putney gets drunk. Three centuries from

*The modern  
delight in  
drunkenness.*

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now, perhaps, it will take as strong an effort of historical imagination to appreciate the fun of Putney's drunken gibes as it takes to-day to appreciate the humour of Hamlet's hoax upon Ophelia.

To recapitulate, I have shown that the plot of Shakspeare's *Hamlet* is that of a crude tragedy of blood; and that in the lost play upon which Shakspeare worked Hamlet's madness was made comic even in the most serious scenes. I have shown, too, that such a state of affairs was quite in character with known traits of Shakspeare's audience. I then showed that, owing to Shakspeare's methods in writing plays, the necessities of the plot upon which he worked, and the prestige of the story, he would not, in refining *Hamlet*, be likely to make it a consistent whole; and moreover that he would not be apt wholly to eradicate the now archaic comic treatment of Hamlet's madness. The probability of this last was strengthened by an exposition of certain scenes in the plays of Shakspeare's contemporaries, and in Shakspeare's own plays, where

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a comic treatment of suffering and madness is evident. Incidentally I have noticed that the Elizabethan attitude toward insanity is not yet extinct. It now remains to show that in Shakspeare's first quarto of *Hamlet* distinct traces remain of the comic treatment of suffering and insanity.

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## V

Several scenes might be cited, for instance the 'Punch and Judy show at Ophelia's grave,' as one critic calls the struggle between Hamlet and Laertes; or the pathetic scene where Ophelia, in her madness, sings amusingly coarse songs. But space restricts me to the scene upon which there is most evidence—that where Hamlet appears to treat Ophelia with such contempt and cruelty. The emotions here, however we may choose to conceive them, are more complex than in any Shakspearean scene yet discussed, and, as will appear later, the archaism of this scene in the lost play is more complete; yet here, if anywhere, it will be possible to clinch my hypotheses and analogies with purely scientific evidence. Not only will the scene in itself be highly significant, but it will, I think, afford the strongest possible evidence in support of the suppositions hitherto advanced.

THAT  
SHAKSPERE  
RETAINED  
THE MAD  
COMEDY

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*The Hamlet-  
Ophelia scene.*

I have tried to prove that in the lost play the Hamlet-Ophelia scene had a comic aspect; and in the character of the many scenes since quoted from the Elizabethan drama, my opinion has received strong though indirect confirmation. When now one tries to fix upon the exact spirit of the Shaksperian version of this scene according to modern conceptions, one finds that it has baffled critics and actors. Johnson and Steevens, who were nearer to Shakspeare in point of time, find, as we have seen, that Hamlet is actuated by sheer cruelty; and many commentators have reiterated the charge, insisting that no skill in acting is able to remove an impression approaching to actual pain, unless by a gross violation of the text and the meaning of the author. The violation referred to consists in making Hamlet see the 'lawful espials,' and in making him wholly insane. His cruelty to Ophelia is then pardonable, one may believe, on the score of self-defense. Certain of the actors however, and notably Booth, have evidently been ill-satisfied with this feeble casuistry, for



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they have represented Hamlet actually mad. Thus both the text and early traditions of the play go by the board. Yet this rendering makes the scene, according to an eminent writer, 'the most terrifically affecting in Shakespeare.' Now any one of these interpretations, from Dr. Johnson down, would satisfy the most exacting. But the fact that almost every commentator and actor has a view radically different from the views of all others, is far from satisfying. For myself, my sole excuse for speaking is that I do not attempt an explanation, but rather try to show that, owing to an inheritance of archaic comedy from the lost play, the facts of the scene, according to modern standards, admit of no reconciliation.

That a trace of comedy persists in the demand that Polonius 'play the foole no where but in his owne house' I have already indicated; but I have omitted to point out how capital a laugh can be made of this if we once quit our conventional reverence for the scene. As <sup>Traces of</sup> <sub>comedy-</sub> Hamlet is speaking, Polonius is peeping out from behind the arras that hangs before the

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'study,' where he has been 'close,' and is quite sure that he is about to gain evidence for the King that Hamlet's madness springs from love. He is visible to the audience, whether or not he has been discovered by Hamlet. But instead of the love-scene, Polonius sees a most astonishing bit of satire on love, and in the end receives a slap in the face himself. A single telling grimace here from the venerable fool would be enough to set the pit howling. The comedy of this situation is distinctly stronger than that in the scene where Hamlet pretends to take Polonius for a fishmonger, because the old courtier is as a woodcock to his own springe, neatly trapped in accordance with the laws both of poetic justice and of the comedy of situation. The scene is, I take it, sufficient to prove a cousinship, however remote, between the German play and the first quarto.

*A guess as to  
this scene in  
the lost play.*

The degree of such relationship cannot be calculated until we settle definitely the character of the corresponding scene in the lost play. A natural supposition is that it stood midway between the Shakspearean and the

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German scenes. Still it is not easy to figure what it would be in this case, any more than to imagine what sort of beast would be cousin to the tiger and the ape. Fortunately in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, we have a scene that is similar enough to be significant on this point. Indeed, as Webster was in the habit of imitating Shakspeare's scenes, this might be regarded as an echo of the earlier version of Hamlet's satire on women.

*Bos.* . . . You come from painting now?

*Old Lady.* From what?

*Bos.* Why, from your scuruy face-phy sicke,

To behold thee not painted enclines some  
what neere

A miracle: These in thy face here, were  
deepe rutts,

And foule sloughes the last progresse:

There was a Lady in *France*, that hauing  
had the small pockes,

Flead the skinne off her face, to make it  
more leuell;

And whereas before she look'd like a Nut-  
meg-grater,

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After she resembled an abortive hedgehog.

*Old Lady.* Doe you call this painting?

*Bos.* No, no, but you call carreening of an old

Morphew'd Lady, to make her disembogue againe,

There's rough-cast phrase to your plastique.'

*Actus II., Scena I.*

The rest of the scene is similarly satirical, but too coarse to quote.

This play, as we have already seen, is a tragedy of blood, bristling with horrors, and without comic underplot. The Old Lady appears only in this scene and one other, and speaks in each about a score of feeble words. Her appearance is obviously a 'fetch'; and, considering the nature of the tragedy, not a 'fetch' to increase the horror. She typifies the vices of women, which, even to-day, we oftenest treat in their merely amusing aspect, and is thus made the object of brutal satire. When she goes out, the tragic incidents of the play are resumed with renewed spirit. If,

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now, Bosola, the villain, were saving himself from tyranny by feigned madness, and the Old Lady were a woman sent—innocently or not—to elicit his secret, a scene precisely similar to the Hamlet-Ophelia scene would result, and would afford even more legitimate sport than the scene in the *Duchess*, because the pretence of madness and the presence of the King and his Councillor in concealment would make a comic 'situation.'

Let us suppose then, for the nonce, that even in the first quarto the Hamlet-Ophelia scene had a distinctly comic aspect, in spite of its seriousness. To realize its precise character in this case we must put aside, first of all, the memory of the Hamlet of the familiar version, and think of the cruder Hamlet of the first quarto. Ophelia, likewise, we must conceive as a very near relative of the 'beawtifull lady' of the *Hystorie*, not as the highly discreet woman of the modern stage. We must bear in mind, too, that many features of the scene had long been familiar to Shakspeare's audience, through the *Hystorie* and the lost play, in a comic form.

*Shakspeare's  
first version of  
the Hamlet-  
Ophelia scene.*

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Let us look at two or three individual speeches. The situation of a man sailing under false colours is very common in comedy, and the blunders it occasions seldom fail to divert an audience. If, when Polonius was so thoroughly outwitted—'Let the doores be shut,' etc.—or while Ophelia was being rated for the vices of women—'Your wantonnesse . . . hath made me madde'—the audience listened with childish delight, then Ophelia's speeches 'Oh heuens secure him!' and 'Pray God restore him,' added hugely to the comedy. If, on the contrary, the Hamlet of the first quarto was so highly endowed with unbalanced intellect that he appeared to the Elizabethan audience quite unhinged, the scene might possibly have appeared, as it is with us, in the words of the prominent critic, 'the most terrifically affecting scene in Shakespeare.' The degree of comedy would probably vary according to the temperament of the spectator. Indeed, my personal opinion is, that Shakspeare's audiences were quite capable of feeling strongly and simultaneously both the archaic

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comedy and the enduring tragedy of the scene. It has too often been necessary in the course of this essay to point out the brutality of some of their mental attitudes, and their lack of modern conventional standards in taste and feeling. How strong their natural instincts were in mirth, pathos, and terror, is evident in the fact that they made possible the marvellously varied and luxuriant Shakspearean drama. It was not without reason that Robert Armin complained of those that 'would not seeme too immodest' in expressing natural feeling; and 'thinke to make all, when God knowes they marre all.' It would perhaps be as well for the modern novel and stage if taste and emotion were more spontaneous and less a matter of critical convention.

Thus far the evidence has been, as hitherto, only partially scientific; but this is not the case with that brought to light by a comparison of the text of the German version already quoted in full (pp. 23, 24) with the text of the first quarto. The fact that there is here the closest verbal parallel

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*The identity of  
the Shakspe-  
rean with the  
German  
version*

places the kinship in spirit beyond reasonable doubt. The only passages in the whole German scene that are unrepresented in Shakspeare are the unimportant sentence 'get thee away . . .' and the anecdote, which there is reason to hope saw light on German soil. When Ophelia enters in the German play, she says 'I pray your highness to take back the jewel which you presented to me;' which is the counterpart of her first speech in the first quarto, 'My Lord, I haue sought opportunitie, which now I haue, to redeliuer to your worthy handes, a small remembrance, such tokens which I haue receiued of you.' The German Hamlet says, 'What, girl! wouldst thou have a husband? . . . Hearken, girl, you young women do nothing but lead young fellows astray.' Shakspeare's Hamlet says, 'But if thou wilt needes marry, marry a foole, For wisemen know well enough, What monsters ye make of them.' After this the German Hamlet says, 'Your beauty you buy of the apothecaries and peddlers,' which in Shakspeare is, 'Nay, I haue heard



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of your paintings too, God hath giuen you one face, And you make your selues another.' Both scenes end with the familiar 'To a Nunnery goe.' Thus the first and last features of the scene are identical, and every intermediate speech in the German version, with the trifling exception noted, is represented in Shakspere. We have here positive proof that the two scenes—one abject buffoonery, and the other capable of appealing to the modern mind as 'the most terrifically affecting scene in Shakespeare'—were constructed on precisely the same lines. If these instances are insufficient, the reader may consult at his leisure the coarse comic treatment of Ophelia's madness in the German play, and compare it word for word with the text of this most tragic scene in Shakspere. The same verbal parallel is evident, though in a less marked degree. We must conclude that even in Shakspere's first version the comic element, now quite archaic, must have been distinctly evident to the Elizabethans. *the final proof that Hamlet's madness had a comic aspect.*

But what of the ultimate Hamlet of the Shaksperian stage? We know that in the

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*Shakspeare's  
final version.*

second quarto the distinctively Shaksperian elements of the Prince's character were added,—the philosophic and the poetic, those flashes of imagination, those deep and fine touches of a moody and cheerless yet noble philosophy. For a treatment of this I refer to the modern critics, who have rightly taken it as the characteristic and significant aspect. The speeches that we know to have come from the old play, however, were left in their places almost intact—in the Hamlet-Ophelia scene quite intact; and though we may assume that the traits last evolved in the Prince's character tended to distract attention from them, to gloss them over, they nevertheless remain to this day stubbornly inconsistent with the gentler traits of the Prince we know and love. When Hamlet is in action he is to be judged by the standards of the tragedy of blood and revenge. It is only in his speech and manner that the Shaksperian conception shines forth. In this fact lies the root of most of the disagreements among the modern critics and actors.

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Yet for the modern stage all this has little significance. Full as our Hamlet is of violations of the text, it is for us the only Hamlet. *The Hamlet of the modern stage.* 'In a deep embayed window Ophelia kneels.' Hamlet 'steadies himself by the balustrade, moves on again mechanically, is stopped by a chair, sinks into it,—still silent, utterly absorbed. In another moment the "To be, or not to be" is uttered in a voice at first almost inaudible. . . . Rising suddenly and crossing toward the window, he sees Ophelia. His whole face changes. A lovely tenderness suffuses it. Sweetness fills his tones as he addresses her. When, with exquisite softness of manner, he draws nearer to her, he catches a glimpse of the "lawful espials" in the gallery above . . . . When he says suddenly, "Where's your father?" he lays his hand upon Ophelia's head, and turns her face up to his as he stands above her. She answers, looking straight into the eyes that love her, "At home, my lord." No accusation, no reproach, could be so terrible as the sudden plucking away of his hand, and the pain of his face as he turns from her. The whole

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*Booth's  
rendering  
described.*

scene he plays like one distract. He is never still. He strides up and down the stage, in and out at the door, speaking outside with the same rapidity and vehemence. The speech, "I have heard of your paintings, too, well enough," he begins in the outer room, and the contemptuous words hiss as they fall. "It hath made me mad" was uttered with a flutter of the hand about the head more expressive than words. As he turned toward Ophelia for the last time, all the bitterness, all the reckless violence seemed to die out of him; his voice was full of unutterable love, of appealing tenderness, of irrevocable doom, as he uttered the last "To a nunnery go!" and tottered from the room as one who could not see for tears.'

The day for horseplay in Hamlet is manifestly past. Even to point out the birth-marks on the play would be a painful task, were not every trait of brutality so obviously outgrown. In a vastly more subtle and significant sense than that of the effusive commentators, Hamlet is 'very nature'; for though we can by no means talk of his acts as of those of 'a re-

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cently deceased acquaintance,' he still lives, breathes, and grows in beauty. The final significance of the Elizabethan Hamlet is, that nature cherishes with endless loving kindness the work of those who create according to her laws, and betters them with each passing century. Every master hand that plays on a Cremona imparts a new harmony to the perfect instrument. The Cathedral softens its sharp outlines with each century that steals over it; while every generation that treads the aisles within enriches its human associations. So with Hamlet. Each actor and critic has divined new traits of beauty, and the generations have so loved the gentleness of the Prince, that in the light of their love the brutal facts of many of the scenes in which he moves are glorified. The modern Hamlet is the real Hamlet. In the truest sense of the word he is the Shakspearean Hamlet; and will continue so, until new ages shall add new beauties to our interpretation.

*The modern  
Hamlet the  
Shakspearean  
Hamlet.*

## Author's Note

*Acknowledgments.*

THE first conception of the present essay was that it should be a general study of the sources of Hamlet, with a view to clearing up, if possible, some of the literary problems of Shakspeare's play. I undertook the work in the winter of 1892—3, at Harvard University, as a matter of form in taking the degree of Master of Arts with Honours in English Literature. While writing the essay I was attending Professor Barrett Wendell's lectures on Shakspeare, published in 1894 by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, under the title of 'William Shakspeare, a Study in Elizabethan Literature.' The idea that the tragic Edgar in *Lear* is none other than the old comic Tom of Bedlam suggested that Hamlet's assumed insanity might also have had a comic aspect, at least in the pre-Shakspearean versions of the story. This idea came to me so late that the new essay it necessitated was hurried and undigested: yet it was one of the two successful theses that year in the competition for the Sohler Modern-Literature prize. During the year following it was impossible to complete my researches; but I have lately been able to

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

do so with the aid of Malone's invaluable library, now in the Bodleian. Here, at the last moment, I came across Sarrazin's little book 'Thomas Kyd und sein Kreis,' the thoroughness and brilliancy of which need no praise of mine. The last chapter of the book gives a clear and admirable exposition of the relationship between the first quarto Hamlet and Kyd's old tragedy of blood, 'Der ur-Hamlet;' and, by showing that all which is least according to Shakspeare's taste proceeded from Kyd, for the first time exonerates Shakspeare from the bizarre cruelty of many of Hamlet's deeds. My own statement of this point, however, I have decided to let stand, much though it suffers by comparison, if only to show that two students, working independently and from quite different points of view, have agreed in these important conclusions. The main point of my essay, the comic aspect of Hamlet's madness, Sarrazin has apparently not suspected. How much of this idea I owe to Professor Barrett Wendell must already be evident. And I am no less obliged to Professor G. L. Kittredge, of Harvard, without whose aid and encouragement I should scarcely have dared to work seriously at so extraordinary a thesis. A course of lectures on the Elizabethan Dramatists by Mr. Geo. P. Baker, also of Harvard, was of vital service. For aid in arranging and proportioning the essay I am obliged to Mr. W. D. Howells, as well as to Professors Wendell and Kittredge; and, for a final criticism of the book as

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

it was going through the press, to Professor F. York Powell, of Oriel College, Oxford.

*Books used.*

The books used were chiefly the two volumes of Furness's admirable *Variorum Hamlet*, which contains the essential information as to all sources, texts, dates, as well as all critical and dramatic interpretations, up to the year of its publication. (J. B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia; and 10, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London. 1877). For the old plays cited, the 'Mermaid Series of the Best Plays of the Old Dramatists' (T. Fisher Unwin, Paternoster Row, London) is perhaps most convenient, though the plays of Kyd are to be found in Dodsley's 'Old English Plays,' edited by W. C. Hazlitt (London, Reeves & Turner, 196 Strand, 1874). In my present citations I have preferred the earliest accessible quartos, and have copied accurately all imperfections of text to emphasise the remoteness of Elizabethan literature from our modern conventions of uniformity and consistency. Gregor Sarrazin's 'Thomas Kyd und sein Kreis, eine Litterarhistorische Untersuchung,' was published in Berlin by Emil Felber, in 1892. 'A Journey into England by Paul Hentzner, in the year M.D.XC.VIII.' was 'printed at Strawberry-Hill. M D C C L V I I.' In modern form, it is most conveniently accessible in Cassell's National Library, London, 1889, 16°. 'A Nest of Ninnies. Simply of themselves without Compound. by Robert Armin.' was 'printed' in



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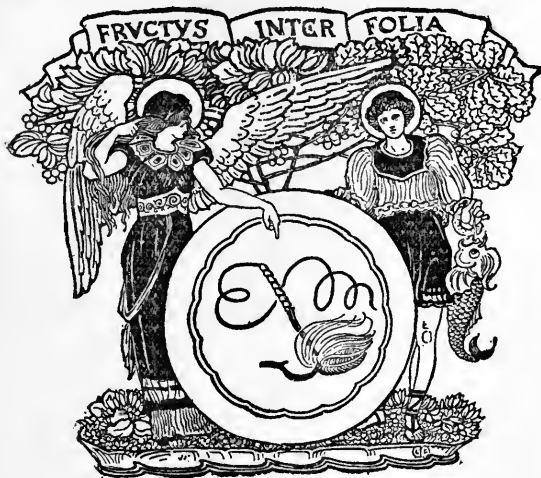
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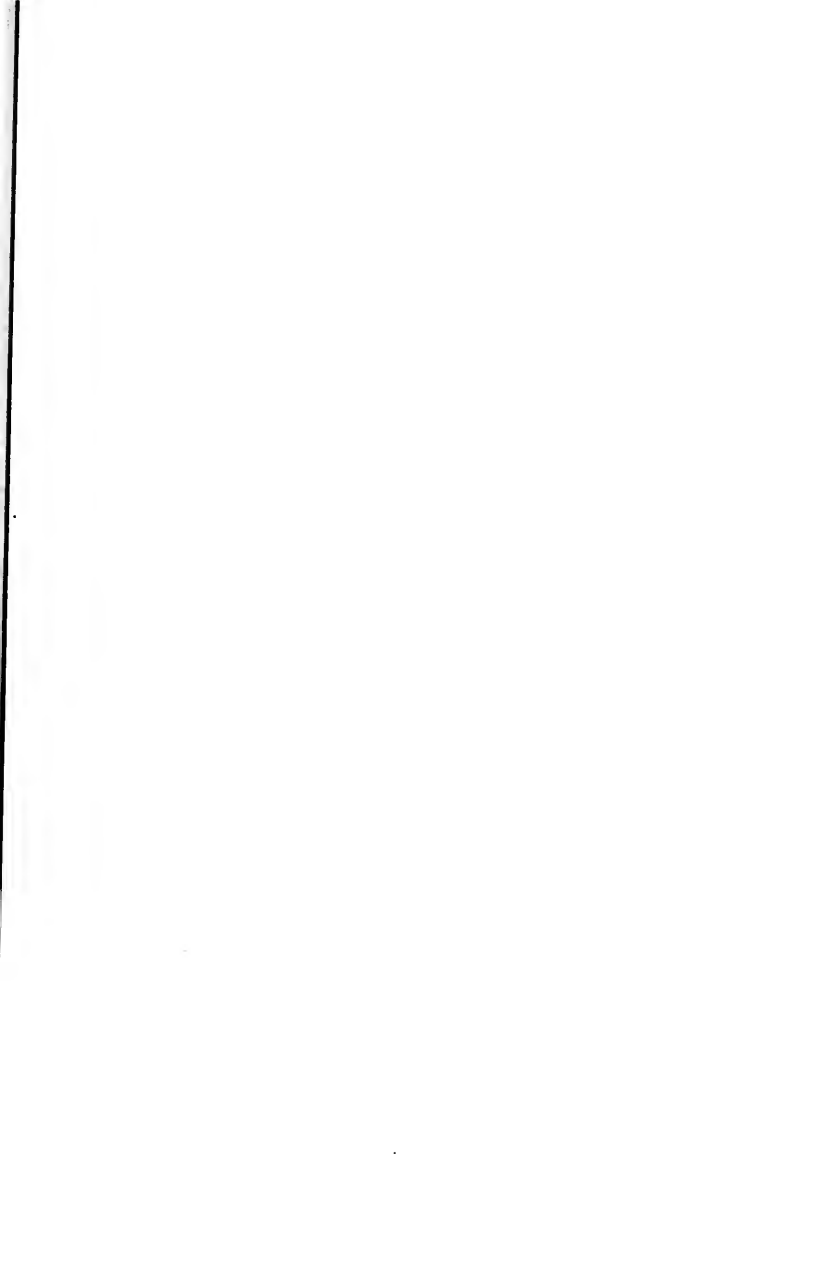
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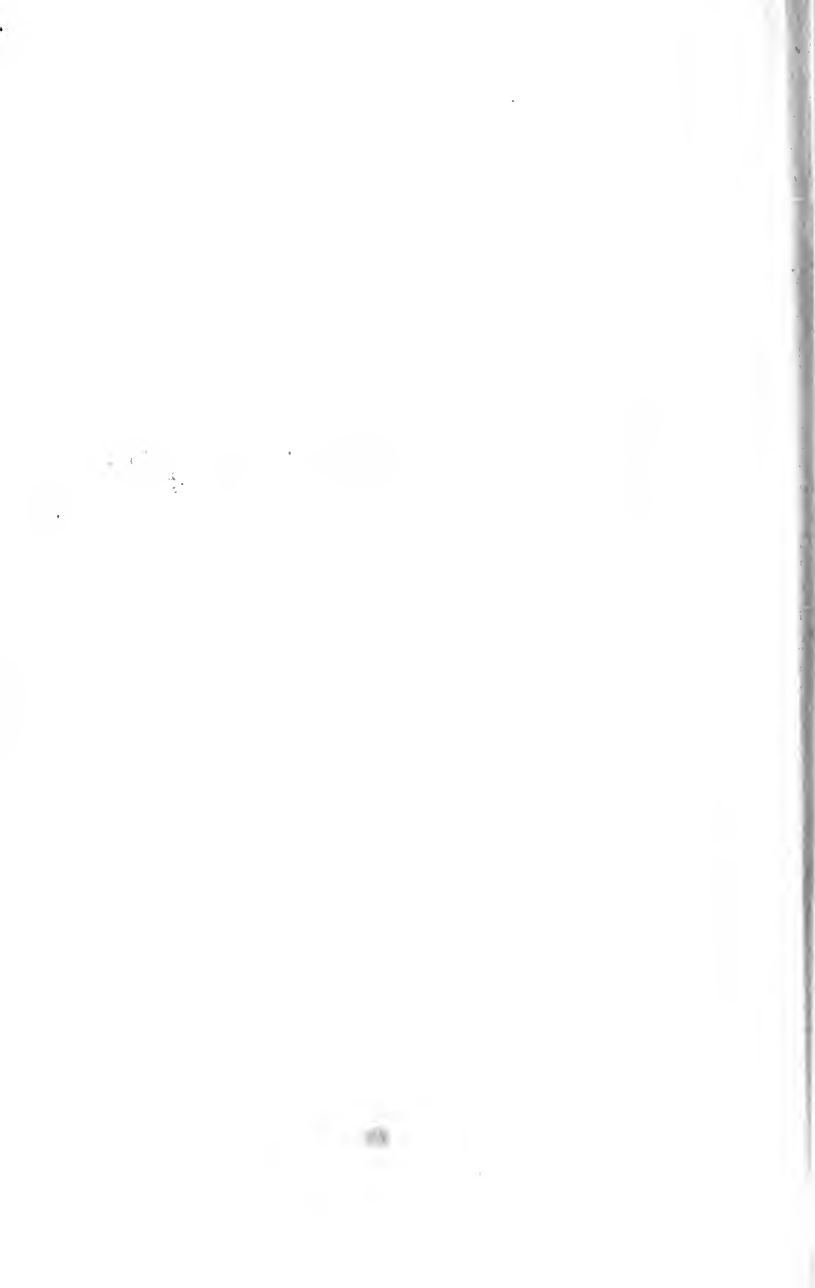
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